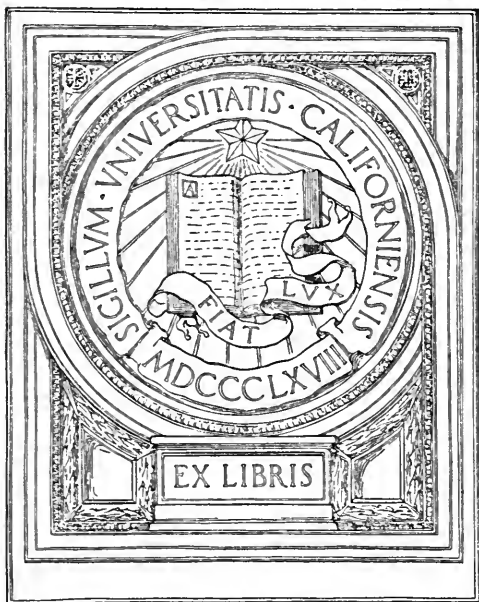




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AT LOS ANGELES



ROBERT ERNEST COWAN











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# SERALTHA

BY

ABEL M. RAWSON



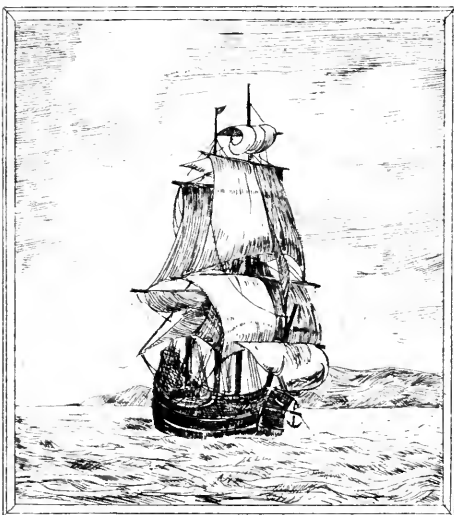
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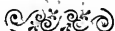
ROBERT ERNEST COWAN

# SERIALS

BY

ABEL M. RAWSON

*Author of "The Junior Partners"*



PUBLISHED BY

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1893

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*Cavil not, ye sticklers for the formulary of probability.  
Above your plane and beyond your ken lies the realm of  
the Incredible, touching the precincts of Impossibility, yet  
in it men and women abide, invisible to your dull search.*

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## CHAPTER I.

**A** GIRL, twenty years of age, stood upon an open sandy space near the summit of a hill that withdrew from the base of Twin Peaks. After a long survey of that part of San Francisco which is known as "The Mission," she turned and looked over the elevation behind her, as if in search of an expected object. In that direction lay the mouth of a glen which had been formed in an unfinished attempt to cut a street through a hill, and from a cottage in the glen issued the tall, muscular form of a negress.

She passed between the moss-covered rocks at the entrance of the glen, appearing suddenly to the full view of the girl upon the sand knoll, who, as though frightened, started rapidly down the hill. Then, stopping suddenly, she turned, and retraced her steps. The look of unconcern which the girl had forced upon her face had no effect upon the negress, who now ran to meet

her with eccentric gesticulations of delight, exclaiming:

“Here’s mah Honey! Lah! lah! Lemme feel yoh hands! Come toh dah house wiv me. Nuffin gwine toh hurt yoh in Lethe St. Pier’s house.”

The girl drew away from her with gestures of dissent, and again sat upon the sand knoll, where she nervously toyed with the jointed handle of her parasol, and looked out toward the pall of smoke upon the bay. Lethe stood awhile in deliberation, and then, approaching her, spoke with language free from dialect.

“Child, you want a good fortune, but you will not go into the house where the spirits come to tell you of it. I wonder they don’t refuse to show me the way for you to act. I suppose it is because your fortune is so near, and so easy for you to take, that you would find it without any help, and they only speak to me about you because I have known them so long. They know that I have loved you ever since the day that you told me you did not like common

things and would not marry any man in "The Mission." There is something in me that feels just as you spoke. I don't know how it came there, for I am very black. Maybe my soul is shaped right, as my face is, and don't have any black on it, as my face has."

Lethe laughed outright at this conceit. The girl looked into her face, and smiled in response. Thus encouraged, Lethe sat upon the sand knoll, and resumed her speech:

"I love you, child, and I don't blame you because you would never come to my house again after you came once. It is not because you don't like me, or because you are afraid. You are nervous. That is what the doctor would say if he could see you sometimes—'specially sometimes—and it is not your fault. I am going to tell you what the spirits told me about your good fortune, right here—if you won't come to my house. When I tell you what the spirits said I know you will come to my house on Pine street. Did the letter tell you about the house?"

The girl nodded assent, and, taking a letter from her pocket, she opened it and read. When she had ceased her reading, Lethe continued:

“There will be no owls there, where you can see them, nor any snakes, nor any boxes that look like coffins, nor anything to make you nervous, but everything to make you happy, until—until—but I will tell you what the spirits said last night. They said—‘Her fortune is near, so that she can reach out her hand and take it. A very rich man is coming toward her. He has never loved. She must accept an invitation that he gives her. If she does she will be happy, for he will take her away from “The Mission,” and give her what she longs for.’ Then they went away.”

“But I do not wish one to give me anything,” said the girl, “unless he will take me—unless he will make me his wife; then I would love him. I long to live in elegance, and—and—I want to get out of ‘The Mission,’ but I want to do it rightly.”

Bitter tones mingled with these sentences.

The girl looked into the face of her companion, who stroked her hand and said:

"A man will do right by a girl if he loves her. You must make him love you. You must show him that you can love with your whole soul. A man worships a woman who does that way."

"I have been taught," said the girl, "that I should be reserved, and that when a man meets me who loves me he will approach and win my love."

"If you do that, nobody will come to you, 'cept the men who live down there," responded Lethe, pointing toward "The Mission." "You can't find elegance there. It's yonder, on the hills, or over there in the big hotels."

The blue in the eyes of the girl deepened to violet shades as they followed the indications of Lethe's finger, and her sight lingered upon the hills, while she continued:

"If you get there, you've got to do your best. I know young married women who were once as poor as you are, and who now have got servants,

silks and diamonds, but they didn't hide themselves away in "The Mission" or in any such place, when they were girls, but got into society in some way—I think, by the way that a society lady, I know, calls 'getting into the edges of it.'"

"What does she mean by that expression?" the girl asked.

"She means just what you can do now. He can take you there, and there you can do the rest. You are beautiful. Men love beauty—marry for it, die for it. Will you accept? Will you go?"

The girl hesitated, and looked down upon "The Mission," then again to the hills. She opened her parasol and raised it over her head although the sun was out of sight behind the Peaks. Several moments passed, during which time Lethe did not speak, and the girl sat rigidly upright gazing toward the western hills.

The parasol slowly lowered, and, falling from her hand, it rolled down the slope of the sand knoll. The face that turned to answer Lethe's questions had become ashen, and the words that

came to her ears seemed as if uttered by one far away:

“I will accept.”

Lethe caught her hands and excitedly spoke sentences of approval in the dialect of the Plantation; but the girl withdrew from her, and, arising, walked a short distance away. Lethe followed, and after a few words, to which the girl gave assent, she went to the glen and disappeared behind the rocks guarding its entrance.

The girl returned to the knoll and raised her parasol from the sand. Closing it, she looked out over the city, from the westward hills to the bay, as if to make a parting survey. An American flag floated above the pall of smoke that covered the waters of the bay, unfurled from a mast upon a distant island and full lighted by the rays of the setting sun shining through a cleft in the westward hills. Scarcely was her attention fixed upon it when the rays gradually crept upward from stripe to stripe, leaving a dark patch lying in relief against the heights beyond. This suddenly fell into the pall below,

and a gun on Alcatraz sent its echoes over the hills toward the departed day.

Awhile she looked thoughtfully at the point where the flag had waved, then downward where her right foot moved about in involuntary action, smoothing the sand. To this, which was of a nervous character, she soon gave attention, and continued to level the sand until she had prepared a narrow strip extending from the place where she had been standing to the base of the sand knoll. With the point of her parasol she wrote upon it two names, one above another. She then looked upon the writing long and thoughtfully.

Twilight had dimmed the outlines of the hills when she was aroused from her meditation by drifts of evening mist floating against her from the heights above. She hastily drew the point of her parasol through the upper name, leaving the other—SERALTHA AMES—and walked slowly down the hill.

The glistening cataract of sun-tipped fog that had poured over the Twin Peaks when she



ascended the slope was now a gray flood, filling the valleys and hiding the city. The old bells of the Mission Dolores were sending their mellow tones abroad, sounding for vespers. "Hail, Mary, full of grace!" "Blessed art thou among women," arose from many lips in the homes below.

The girl kept on her way in silence.



## CHAPTER II.

**A**LTHOUGH the face and form of Seraltha Ames were of uncommon beauty, her apparel would receive the first notice from a critical observer—not because of harmony with her person, but for the reason that the style and trimmings were of recent fashion while the material was out of date. Strips of new, gray-fox fur about the collar and along the front of her half-length cloak showed in contrast to the other material, which had yielded gloss to time and service, and her gown displayed new braids and laces upon its much-worn brown surface. A brown velvet turban, adorned with a gray plume; new kid gloves, matching in shade the fox-fur of her cloak; well-fitted, fashionable shoes, covering a shapely foot, and a steel-gray veil, completed the visible portion of her apparel. She had raised the veil from her face and caught it in graceful arrangement against her hat and over thick coils of light

brown hair that fell to the fur-trimmed collar in stylish plaits.

Her tall form showed that muscular symmetry which enchains the admiration of ardent manhood, and which is frequent among women whose maternal ancestors were engaged in manual labor, but who themselves are accustomed to light physical or intellectual employments. Her shoulders spread slightly beyond the sculptor's lines of beauty, and her low, firm bust suggested a sinewy development. Her long waist, shapely without the aid of stays, met a lower form that moved with firmness and grace.

Her features showed the strong jaw of the Gael, modified by the oval of Latin forefathers; a low, broad forehead upon a perfect angle with a thin nose that was slightly aquiline, and heavy, arched brows over eyes set deep and well apart. Her marble complexion expressed determination, and was relieved in color by full, scarlet lips, and dark blue eyes that unclosed violet depths when she became interested in observation or conversation.

A cottage home, the only estate of her widowed mother, showed to her view, and her sight rested there after a sweeping over the streets and squares spreading from it. Little of beauty lent attractiveness to its neighborhood, except the ever-living foliage that nature spreads profusely toward the constant sun of Californian skies; but much of commonplace utility prevailed. Wooden houses of square façade, and cheaply built, overlooked the streets, their monotony being broken by factories, stables and other evidences of the presence of labor. Grammar-schools reared their severe architecture above flat roofs. Infrequent churches rested in quiet amidst the turmoil of industry, all unpretentious, except one—that of the Mission Dolores—and this conspicuous only from the aid of the convent and the schools.

The missionary founders called their home Mission Dolores, when sands shifted their drifts along the places where a city now stands; and they delved there for the wealth of souls when the wealth of the mountains beyond them

was unknown. The magic of gold spread a city before them that enclosed the boundaries of their possessions, and their presence gave name to the section about them.

This section is known as "The Mission." With limits undefined it stretches away from the Mission Dolores in denser habitations as it blends with the city northward. Upon the south are bunched neighborhoods isolated by sandy or rocky openings. "The Mission" has a character, a positive individuality. It is the "man of all work" in the household of San Francisco.

An expression of sinister triumph lighted the face of Lethé St. Pier as she watched the form of the girl disappearing in the mists of "The Mission," and it shone through the Senegambian ebon that seemed to veil her features. Lighter patches covering her cheek bones appeared with greater distinctness, and indications of a superior blood in her veins were manifest in her glance. Had it not been for the iris of her eyes, which reflected midnight over their white

boundaries, her color would have seemed artificial.

She was born of a slave mother on a sugar plantation in one of the lower parishes of Louisiana, and an early life in the fields had developed her into a muscular machine, with the capability of a slave man. Plantation tradition had connected her paternity with the name of an eminent planter-politician. As a soldier he fell in battle in Mexico, and when Lethe was fourteen she was taken to New Orleans and placed in service in the family of a physician. Here she was taught the art of nursing women; but her hours of recreation were spent in circles of negro superstition—the voodooes, the fortune-tellers, and, later, among the devotees of higher credulities—the solvers of dream-puzzles and the subjects of spirit hallucinations. Fearless from inheritance, she had gathered from the dissecting rooms, the cemeteries and the bayous, grim symbols of the mystic universe.

At the age of twenty-five she was taken to

San Francisco, where she was left, and where she resumed her occupation of nurse, varied with fortune-telling, match-making in the interest of ambitious girls, and, likely, darker work for rich men who knew of her intelligence and discretion. After two years she disappeared from her usual haunts and was not accessible to many; it was when she removed to the glen in the hills. Here her visitors were few, but were of high quality, and they came generally at night.

Through association with persons of refinement she had acquired a fair command of the English language, but when under the influence of emotion the accent of the parish Plantation would prevail. Though childless, she gave the love of a mother to selected objects of the superior race.

She turned toward the glen, her turban of intertwined handkerchiefs, (one red and the other black,) showing sombre in the gathering shadows. At the closed end of the artificial glen stood Lethe's hut—long, low and rudely

constructed, and lighted by small windows cut close under the eaves. There were three apartments. The sole entrance to the hut faced the opening of the glen and admitted to a kitchen whose simple furnishings rested on a clean rock floor.

A stuffed owl, suspended near the roof, first drew the attention of the visitor by his startling appearance and position. With neck outstretched and wings half spread, he seemed about to pounce upon some object below him. His staring eyes—adjusted obliquely by a careless taxidermist—glistened with an uncertain aim that brought greater discomfort to a timid observer than would a well-defined intention; and the winds that swept down from the Peaks and, penetrating the hut, ruffled his feathers, gave him an ominous animation.

Articles of household comfort crowded the second apartment, among them a tall chiffonier near a corner, which concealed the entrance to the third room. In this latter apartment as in the second, was a canvas ceiling, and, occupying



a position like that of the owl in the first room, a large stuffed serpent hung suspended from the canvas by almost invisible threads. Its color was a dingy and mottled brown, and it belonged to a species common in the Southern States. It hung coiled and head downward, as though about to spring upon its victim, the head swaying gently with the moving of the canvas by the wind.

During early morning hours strollers about the hills had obtained occasional glimpses through the open door of the hut, and had noticed a man who sat upon one of the wooden stools of the kitchen, or lounged upon a long, coffin-shaped box that lay upon the floor. One stroller had secured a full view of him as he sat near the door, and afterwards told his neighbors in "The Mission" that this man had constantly held a sponge in his mouth, except that sometimes he would moisten it in water, and, when replaced, one-half of it would protrude from his mouth.

### CHAPTER III.

**A**N hour later a carriage halted at the foot of the hill into which the glen penetrated. A man alighted from it who sat upon the driver's seat, carefully taking with him a heavy parcel, and with difficulty he opened the door of the carriage, still holding the parcel. After the single occupant had stepped from the carriage the man placed the parcel upon a seat within it. Withdrawing a short distance, the two engaged in conversation. A few moments afterward the inside passenger walked up the hill. The one who rode on the outside tied the horses to a tree. While ascending the upper slope of the hill the inside passenger lost his direction in the darkness and stumbled upon the sand knoll, his hands plunging deeply into it. His right hand grasped an object, lightly covered beneath its surface. When he arose, he held that in his hand which he had grasped when he fell. After brushing the sand from

his garments, he placed the object in an outside pocket of his overcoat. Shuffling around the sand knoll he continued his walk to the glen, and groped his way through its denser darkness until he arrived at the door of the hut. He stood awhile in an attitude of listening, and, hearing no voices within, he rapped upon the door.

After a short interval Lethe St. Pier opened the door and led him through the first apartment into the second, which was dimly lighted by an oil lamp standing upon the dresser, its chimney supporting a shade of purple porcelain. She asked him to be seated in one of the easy chairs, taking the other for her own use.

Her visitor was Chalmer Grose, President of the Sierra Nevada Mining Association.

In its earlier existence, although the officers made frequent purchases of ranches, business lots upon central streets and promising mining properties, besides building many structures, the S. N. M. A. was (as the President habitually said regarding it) "in hard luck."

Various unfortunate and unforeseen happenings in the various mines under its control made necessary many assessments that affected the purse and the patience of the heavier outside stockholders, who, after a season of hope succeeded by despair, had put their stock upon open market. This action alarmed the multitude of small holders who hastened to follow their example.

The officers of the Association, seemingly, had faith in the future prosperity of its affairs, because some of the members continued to purchase stock all the way down the decline that followed, and at the bottom of its public valuation they took all that their brokers could find upon sale. That the faith of the officers was well founded soon afterward became evident. The mines began to develop dazzling possibilities. In one a drift became richer upon an extended opening; in another a pocket expanded like an inverted balloon, and in others bonanzas appeared—ore everywhere, in unheard-of quantity, in piles and masses.

S. N. M. A. stock advanced several thousand points. The public was allowed an inning, of which the record showed an unbroken score of errors, indicating a transfer of the former "hard luck" of the Association to the unskillful outsiders. Thereafter, the value of S. N. M. A. stock depended wholly upon the purposes of its officers.

Favored by these conditions, Chalmer Grose made much profit, and engaged in investments and enjoyments. He was middle-aged, unmarried and small of stature. His movements were suggestive of that very common word, wiry. This quality governed his speech, being manifested in epigrammatic sentences, to which the wiry muscles of his face moved in emphasis. Short, iron-gray hair covered his head, which inclined to a stiff coarseness, and met strips of side-whisker standing in relief upon his otherwise clean-shaved face. His small, sharp, grey eyes, his thin nose, thin lips, strong jaw, and large chin, indicated much determination, and something of the baser qualities.

Both occupants of the second apartment in the hut had remained silent, until Chalmer Grose became uneasy in his chair, and had several times shifted his position, when he impatiently said:

"Well, Mamma St. Pier, what is your answer?"

"She says, yes."

"How about her preparations?"

"They will be made in the Pine street house. I shall move there to-morrow."

He reflected awhile, and then said:

"You are to hold it five years?"

"Yes, sir; and everything that is in it."

"Yes; that was the agreement."

"That is not all, Chalmer Grose."

"A visitor will call upon you." He reflected again, and added: "He will call again at a future time, if you fail in your work." He looked at her significantly.

As if a knowledge of his power had suddenly come to her, showing that she might be made a subject to it, the brave heart of Lethe St. Pier

felt its first quailings of fear. She responded to him in the language of her childhood:

"I'se allas gwine toh do foh yoh. Don't yoh know dat?"

"If you don't fail, Mamma St. Pier, I am a good friend to you."

"I'se nebber gwine toh fail yoh."

"She will be ready on time?"

"Yes, sah."

"The reception is next Wednesday evening—just a week."

"Yes, sir." Fear had quickly fled from its unaccustomed place.

"The special train for Monterey leaves Third and Townsend streets at noon."

"Shall she meet you there?"

"I will call at the Pine Street house at eleven."

"She will be waiting for you."

"The handsomest woman at the reception!" exclaimed Chalmer Grose, the wiry muscles of his face drawing into lines of satisfaction. "And the receptions of the Second Regiment draw the finest. Pretty name, too—Seraltha."

"She is a perfect lady, besides being handsome," said Lethe.

He made no answer to this assertion, but the lines of satisfaction upon his face seemed to extend throughout his body, moving his muscles and causing his hands to caress each other.

"She has been away from home," continued Lethe, "at school, at Santa Rosa, and she lived there with a good family. She was company for the lady, who is sick, and she got used to nice ways. When she got through school—it was a seminary—and came home, she could not seem to like the people in "The Mission," especially the young men, though she had played with them when she was a child, and they wanted to show her attention. Her mother's house is small and has poor furniture, while the one at Santa Rosa is large, and has fine grounds all around it, and fine furniture in every room. She is afraid that if she marries any young man who works for wages, she will live in the same way her mother does, and she dreads that more."

"Good surface indications," interrupted Chal-



mer Grose, who was giving eager attention to Lethe's words, and whose hands had not yet ceased their mutual caresses.

"Of what, sir?"

"Of satisfactory results. Go on, Mamma St. Pier."

"And she dreads that more than nursing in rich families, or teaching school, or"—

"Pooh! pooh! Does she never think of anything else than employment?"

"Yes, she said she would marry, even a man a great deal older than herself, if he was a good man and had money. When I told her that you admired her from the gallery of the Pavilion—at the Mechanics' Ball—she listened to me, and when I told her about your wealth, and that you went in the best society, she said she would marry such a man if she could love him and he loved her."

"Love! Marry! Nonsense! Who has said anything about love or marriage?" he exclaimed, giving emphasis with his hand upon the arm of

the easy chair. "Notions! notions! Get them out of her head."

"Me, sir?"

"You!" He leaned far forward in his chair and added, "for me!"

"I'se gwine toh try, sah," Lethe responded, as if thoughts of his power had again come to her.

"Try? Do it! Get her in there," (pointing with his thumb toward the wall of the third apartment) "and get the spirits to help you."

"Dah light's gone out, sah. I lef it foh—foh—somebuddy toh tend, en deh doan ermember. Spirits nebber gwine to come in dat room any more."

"Then start it in the dark room of the Pine-street house, next to the furnace room. You know of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't use it until after the reception. I will call soon after and give you advice."

"If you see her in San Francisco in a month after the reception it must be before the third

day, for she leaves on Saturday to spend that time with the lady at Santa Rosa—Mrs. Abel Hyman is her name. Her husband has a law business in the city, and Seraltha will meet him at the ferry, Saturday, and go with him to his home. She told me about this visit before you spoke of the reception.”

He sprang from his chair and grasped her arm with both hands. She felt his fingers sink into her flesh and saw the muscles of his face setting in lines of anger. She shrank away from him over the further side of her chair and with sudden movement drew her arm from his grasp, his clutch rending the sleeve of her heavy gown. As if awed by this evidence of her superior strength, he retraced his steps and slowly sunk into his chair, the lines of anger in his face sinking behind an aspect of astonishment.

The black iris of Lethe's eyes grew smaller, and the bands around them expanded and glistened in a white flame, tinted with the purple

of the porcelain shade. Bending toward him, she demanded—

“Chalmer Grose! Cuz why yoh clutch me? No white man gwine toh do dat toh Lethe St. Pier. He’s gwine to fine hisself choke dead, shuah nuff!”

“No! No! Not you, Mamma St. Pier, not you,” he quickly responded, his speech bearing tones of apology mingled with the discord of anger which escaped in husky quavers, as he continued: “Abe Hyman! Abe Hyman! *He* is the one I could crush!”

“Cuz why doan you squose Marsa Hyman, den? I’s aint Marsa Hyman. What’s agin dat white man? Doan yoh like him?” Assurance that her visitor’s conduct meant no ill to herself dispelled her anger, and she resumed her usual demeanor and speech: “Seraltha says he is a grand gentleman, and when he speaks in Court the judge and jury believe what he says, and when he is at home his wife forgets she is sick.”

A sneering laugh, forcing its escape from

around the set teeth of Chalmer Grose, interrupted Lethe's speech. Following the laugh came the words, "Desperado! Murderer!" Taking relief for his emotions by a deep breath drawn quickly through his opened mouth, he continued, with dictatorial sentences: "She must not go with him Saturday, or any other day—never! She must be kept away from him—kept away—always—away from Santa Rosa. You must keep her from him—from Santa Rosa. You must keep her in the city!"

"Me, sir?" gasped Lethe, amazed by the difficulties in the way of this new duty.

"Yes, you!—for me."

"Yes, sir; but I don't think any harm would come from her visit," said Lethe.

"Everything harmful! He is prejudiced against me. Do you understand? She might say something that would cause trouble. You must not fail to keep her away from him."

Arising from his chair and taking his hat, he said, significantly: "The visitor will call soon

after I leave. I know that you will not fail me at any point."

When Chalmer Grose arrived at his carriage, he directed the man in waiting to go on a mission to the glen, which was soon accomplished. Returning, the man mounted to the driver's box, and drove northward into the city, finally halting the carriage at the Hotel Havencourt.

Here Chalmer Grose alighted and went to his suite of rooms. He hastened to examine the object that he had grasped in his fall upon the sand knoll. This object, as he held it under the gas-light with one hand while adjusting his eye-glasses with the other, showed to be a letter, with the name "Seraltha Ames" written upon its envelope in the cramped characters of an unpracticed hand. That he was eager to know its import he showed by haste in withdrawing the sheet from the envelope. Shaking the sand from among its folds, he read aloud, hesitating at times because of misspelling and indistinct writing:

“MISS SERALTHA:—

“Of you I ask if Wednesday you will meet me on the sand knoll? You are afraid to come in my house, so meet me at six the afternoon on the sand knoll. The gentleman must have his answer if you go to Monterey. I so much love you I will the money pay for new dresses. You will have plenty money sometime, and you pay me then. The gentleman says he not come to your mother’s house in ‘The Mission.’ Everybody in ‘The Mission’ say ‘poor girl she, rich man he—shame!’ I take a house out Pine street. House mine, furniture mine. You sometime marry a rich man. Wednesday meet me on the sand knoll. You say yes. I much love you.

“LETHE.”

After reading, Chalmer Grose made comments: “Sentiments all right; scheme all right; the woman all right; but who is this ignorant fellow who writes letters for her? He will find the drift. My name is not on it, though. Sharp woman!”

Taking a cigar from his case he lighted it, and, holding the flame of the taper against a

corner of the letter, threw the blazing missive into the grate.

He passed out of his parlor and went directly to the "cinch-room" of the Hotel Havencourt—facetiously called so, because the purses of visiting stockmen were reduced to small dimensions by resident miners who opposed them in games of cards played therein. When Chalmer Grose entered the cinch-room, the clock by the door struck ten. When he passed out, well toward morning, he took with him the bank check of a stockman from Mendocino county. This check read: "Pay to the order of Chalmer Grose, five thousand dollars."

Before the expected visitor arrived at the door of Lethe's hut, she had heard his footsteps and held the door open for his entrance. Guided by the glimmering of reflected light upon the walls to the dense darkness of the open doorway, and making no response to Lethe's challenge, he laid a parcel just within the threshold and walked rapidly away.

"Foh dah Lawd, dis mighty curus!" exclaimed



Lethe, who had heard the heavy parcel strike the stone floor, and who, when the visitor's retreating footfalls were no longer heard, began to measure its dimensions with her toe. "Er white man, er yaller man, er black man? No-buddy knows! Er rock, er gole mine, er dinnymite? Nobuddy fines out! Dahs no spirits done frow dis in dah doh. Massa Chalmer Grose say, 'Visitah.' Dahs no visitah Massa Chalmer Grose knows gwine toh frow dinnymite in dah doh. I'se gwine to fine out for shuah, what dah visitah done frow in dah doh."

Closing the door and securing it, she raised the parcel from the floor, and still speaking in the dialect which she always used in her soliloquies, bore it into the second apartment, and laid it upon the dresser near the lamp. With speech implying the purport of every movement, she whirled one of the easy chairs before the dresser and sat upon it. During the lapse of several moments she addressed the parcel with questions and comments; then, arising from her chair and approaching it, she pressed

its surface with her fingers, feeling about the corners and along the edges. No satisfaction resulting from this inspection, she drew a pair of heavy scissors from the dresser and cut the strong cord securing the outer wrapper. When she removed the wrapper, an oblong box of heavy pasteboard came to her view, its cover also secured by a cord.

She hesitated before this second impediment in the way of her investigation, making inquiries of it regarding its contents, and comments upon the crushed condition of its corners. She then cut the cord and slowly raised the lid from the box. What met her eyes was a bulging bag of heavy buckskin, its opening firmly secured by a strong leather thong.

Her expanding eyes, her shining teeth, forming into lengthening ranks, her swelling chest, and her sinewy hands clutching the buckskin bag as they would an escaping bird, showed her comprehension of the convex ridges upon its surface, and her arms twining around it, when

she afterwards laid it against her bosom, told of her love for the contents.

Holding it upon her arm, she lowered the folding bed and reclined upon it. Lying upon her side with her head resting upon a heavy pillow, which she pushed upward beyond her shoulder, she bent forward so that her eyes might rest upon the buckskin bag, which she laid upon the counterpane, near her bosom.

She could count correctly and knew the value of coins. She stroked the bag awhile, crooning to it like a mother to her child, and then loosened the heavy thong that secured the opening. A yellow stream poured out upon the red counterpane of her bed, clinking its melody as it rushed around the mouth of the bag into the depression upon either side.

She quickly drew the heavy skirt of her gown over it and listened intently. Hearing a slight noise, she raised herself upon her elbow and peered about the room from side to side. A light breeze from landward had flitted across the bay and pushed a zephyr over the

edge of the glen, which fell upon the hut and puffed the canvas lining of the apartment. The serpent in the apex over her head stirred lightly in its meshes. Partly assured by these movements that the wind had caused her fear, she again reclined upon the pillow, yet holding the skirt over her treasure, and soliloquized in low tones:

“Nobuddy gwine toh tromp on dah hill in dah night time! Nobuddy 'spex he fine somefin in dis house, 'cep spirits!”

Turning her head so that sound might enter at both ears, she continued:

“Nuffin, 'cep dah wind! Nuffin steps on dem rocks en doan clatter. Wind shuah nuff!” The canvas lining moved again.

Arising upon her elbow, she threw the skirt back to its place, and, touching the gold which had flowed from the buckskin bag with light caress, she exclaimed:

“A'int dey lubly! Dah harp on dah side plays dah lubliest music, 'cep dem heabenly harps. Lemme see more! Draw dat bag

off. Ea-sy—ea-sy—ea-sy. Sh-h-h! Dem harps playin' agin! Ea-sy—ea-sy—ea-sy. Dar! Lah! Lah! Look at dat! Jes see it! I'se gwine toh git crazy! I'se crazy now, foh shuah! Lemme holler! Sh-h-h! Ebbary one twenty dollars. Nebber anythin on dis yearth as lubly as dem twenty dollars. Lethe! Lethe St. Pier! Is dis yoh? Lemme feel! Lethe! Is dis yoh? Is dis money yohs? Yes! for shuah! Lemme count: One—two—three—four—five. One hundred. One—two—three—four—five. Two hundred. One—two—three—four"— Her voice fell to silence, but her lips moved in response to the action of her hand silently placing the coins in yellow ribbons of five, clustered in groups of ten.

Five yellow groups rested within the arc formed by her bended body. With her head upon the pillow and her eyes feasting upon their beauties, Lethe St. Pier waited for the morrow.

At six, the old bells of the Mission Dolores threw out their peals upon the still morning air, sounding for the "Angelus." "Holy Mary,

Mother of God, pray for us, sinners!" ascended in many voices from the city below, and mingled with their tones. Within the hut crouching in the glen a woman, wearing the garb of day, lay upon the folding bed asleep, her hands groping among the golden ribbons shining against the red counterpane.



## CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE house on Pine street was situated upon an upper slope of a western hill, well within one of the populous neighborhoods of the city. It stood high above the pavement upon an angle of two streets, and its ample lawns that suggested over-shrubbiness upon their lower slopes were protected in position by heavy stone walls rising from the sidewalks. A long granite stairway gave access to the front, and in the rear a steep driveway led from the side street to a barn. This driveway extended through an arched opening in the barn and continued along a broad causeway that crossed a depression in the grounds to the rear porch of the house.

Above the arched opening in the barn were three sleeping-rooms, one having an exclusive stairway and double windows opening toward the house, the others a stairway in common, ending at a landing that touched the threshold

of each. One of the latter opened by a small door into the lofts above the stable-room. This room was windowless and dark, except from the light which sifted through crevices or struggled through the opened door of the lofts. A telephone hung against the wall of the room fronting the house on Pine street. In this barn Chalmer Grose housed his horses, carriages and their attendants.

The house was a study in that architectural deformity called "English basement." The interior arrangement of the basement included a hall midway of its width and extending along its length, ending against a landing which connected with a stone stairway leading to the higher ground of the rear. This stairway was closed by a door of plate iron that swung inwardly a few steps below the outside landing. A dining-room, kitchen, etc., occupied the space upon the right of the hall, while, upon the left, folding doors opened into a reception-room. Beyond were dressing-rooms. No other door



appeared upon that side of the hall, except that of the furnace-room, far to the rear.

The long stairway leading to the main floor was supported against the left wall. This stairway led to a broad hall, that extended from its upper landing, to the rear porch. Upon the right of the landing, a vestibule spread to twin windows opening to a side veranda. An arched entrance from the vestibule, ornamented with heavy curtains drooping in graceful folds, led to spacious double parlors, extending along the full front of the house. These were separated by tinted scroll work, embossed with vines and leaves carved on its surface. Opposite to the parlor entrance folding doors opened into a family room, en suite with a sleeping-room and others beyond. The same arrangement of rooms appeared upon the opposite side of the house in the rear of the further parlor, but were differently furnished, having articles of gorgeous colors; the dressing-room and chamber giving evidence of use as a bachelor's apart-

ments. Other furniture of the house was in good taste.

The servants' rooms were upon the floor above, and were lighted by windows projecting from a much-gabled roof.

This house, with its ample grounds, was the least of the properties of Chalmer Grose. Stocks, bonds, mining interests, buildings on central streets, and an immense grain ranch—its confines begirding the aborted homes of a thousand families—were among the greater. The architecture was in accord with his tastes and the interior with his purposes. Entertainment, of a society nature, was included, at first, with that of congenial friends and individual acquaintances. Awhile this prospered. Later, society, while holding opened doors for his entrance to its drawing-rooms, sent letters of regret in response to his invitations. This caprice of society becoming positive in its action, he removed himself to a suite of rooms in the Hotel Havencourt, leaving the house and its furnishings to the care of a housekeeper.

This was the situation, when an express delivery ascended the steep driveway, and halted by the rear porch, in the evening following that of the conversation in the hut. The wagon, besides the driver, contained Lethe St. Pier and such of her effects as she desired to place in her new home. Alighting, she passed around the house by way of the lawn and rang the bell of the front door. Her summons was quickly answered by the housekeeper, who, when she opened the door and saw Lethe's dark face and muscular form, dimly lighted by a single gas jet burning in the hall, shrank back and attempted to close it against the visitor. The door met Lethe's foot, thrust between itself and the casing, quickly succeeded by her knee and shoulder. The efforts of the housekeeper were but a feather weight against the strength of Lethe St. Pier, who in an instant stood within the hallway, her eyes flashing in anger and her opponent shrinking toward the stairway leading to the upper floor.

"Cuz why yoh slam dah doh?" Lethe de-

manded. "Cuz why yoh doan say, 'come in?' My mind's workin' foh tah frow yoh down dem front steps, onto dah sidewalk. Cuz why yoh push dah doh ginst dah lady when she's comin toh her own house?"

"You!—your house!" stammered the housekeeper, retreating up the stairway several steps and regarding her visitor suspiciously, as if doubting her sanity.

"Yes'm; my house!" answered Lethe, with strong emphasis on the possessive, "en ebbrything that's in it."

"This house belongs to Mr. Chalmer Grose," responded the housekeeper, taking another step upwards, "and everything that is in it, and I am paid to care for it."

"Massa Chalmer Grose doan ah gwine toh hab nuffin toh do wiv dis house any moh. He done rent it to me, en ebbrything that's in it. Yoh's gwine toh get yoh trumperies outen it, on dah 'spress wagon by dah back doh. Yoh dohs me 'spectable, yoh done stay all night.

Yoh dohs me 'strepulus, yoh's gwine out, dis minit."

Lethe began a vigorous ascent of the stairs, the housekeeper fleeing before her advance through the upper hall, out at the rear door, and past the express-delivery to the carriage-room of the barn. Lethe did not pursue her beyond the delivery, but halted there and gave the driver orders to deposit his load upon the porch. The housekeeper took time to regain her composure. She then went to the room fronting the house and conversed through the telephone. What was said in answer to her inquiries appeared to be decisive, and in Lethe's favor; for she stopped upon the way when returning to the house and bargained with the expressman for the transfer of her effects. Lethe, in the meantime, had placed her property near the stairway in the vestibule, and was seated upon one of the larger bundles. The housekeeper hesitated when she entered the hall, and Lethe, noticing her indecision, arose and said:

"Come on, ma'am. I am ready to assist you."

"Wh—where is the other one?" stammered the housekeeper, cautiously advancing toward the vestibule.

"There is no other one. I am Lethe St. Pier, the owner of this house for five years."

"Yes; yes'm; he said so. I am going."

The housekeeper, now trembling, and staring at Lethe, entered the vestibule, carefully avoiding a near approach to her, and passed into the family room, closing the door behind her. Her white teeth, slowly extending their ranks, gave the only evidence that Lethe had noticed the fright of the housekeeper, who, when she was ready for departure, asked the driver of the delivery to aid her in the removal of her effects to his wagon. The driver said to her, after he had turned his horses upon the causeway:

"It be dangerous if that woman is your enemy. She is stronger than I am."

Lethe continued her preparations for permanent occupation of the house far into the night,

placing articles that she had brought, without hesitation, as if she had thought of and decided upon their positions before she came. She was familiar with the house, having been a frequent visitor before the time in which society sent letters of regret. These visits were in the interest of Chalmer Grose, who paid her much money for special service.

Just before retiring she went to the furnace-room, bearing in one hand a tin oil lamp, and in the other articles of furniture. She went directly to a further corner of the room and opened a section of the wainscoting which acted as a door, yet concealed from sight when closed by the mouldings and cornice. This led to a dark room under the gorgeously furnished chamber on the floor above, and of the same dimensions. The floor was littered with boxes, baskets, empty bottles and broken glassware. A narrow stairway extended to a trap-door opening into the room above. Nothing else was visible in the room, except the aperture of a ventilator in a corner opposite the stairway.

Lethe cleared away the litter in the room and put it in the area under the porch. When she had retired to the sleeping-room of the family suite, a tin oil lamp pushed its dim light over the surface of a small pine table within the dark room, and near by stood a mutilated cane-seated chair waiting in the gloomy shadow.

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Madam Convincia Hitts (fashionable dress-maker) and her expert assistants, unfolded cloth, laces, trimmings, etc., upon a table in the family room during the morning following Lethe's occupancy. Three gowns were made from these.

The material that first came under the scissors of Madam Hitts was of pearl silk, *moire antique*, and as she placed it upon Seraltha (she having arrived soon after the advent of Madam Hitts) for the first fitting, exclaimed:

"The ideal! Just to your style! your complexion! your form! yourself!"



Upon the second fitting, the skirt was seen to be *en train*, with deep, white lace foot-ruchings, the revers bordered with swansdown, and the front drawn close to the lower form. Against this deviation from her idea of propriety Seraltha strongly protested, standing before a mirror and showing wherefore.

“Some draw much closer, Miss. After you have worn it an hour in society you will feel that you are a trifle behind the style,” said Madam Hitts.

The skirt was removed and laid aside, bearing its original stitchings.

Upon the third fitting, the pointed bodice waist held the swansdown border of its corsage against the curve of her shoulders, nestling its angle far down the revealments spreading between. Madam Hitts noticed the flushed face reflected in the mirror as she stood behind Seraltha. Anticipating objections, she said:

“A beautiful form, Miss. Such firmness, such tints, I have seldom seen. The corsage

should have been cut square instead of V-shaped. The change is easily made."

"No, Madam! this is enough—too much!" stammered Seraltha, pressing the angle of the swansdown against her bosom.

"When you see the others," persisted Madam Hitts, "you will feel yourself too much covered, and will regret this decision. None will excel your beauty; few approach it." Moving to unlace the bodice, she continued: "A few moments will suffice to"—

"No, Madam!" interrupted Seraltha, "I would not wear it. I shall wear a cluster of flowers upon this."

"If you must, Miss, La France roses, by all means. Only three, remember, only three, half blown, with three small buds and four rose-leaves. This dress is fit for a queen's reception, and"—(Madam Hitts added, as she looked admiringly upon Seraltha, whose eyes had deepened to violet and the color of her cheeks to scarlet), "you to be the queen."

The next day—Saturday—the scissors of

Madam Hitts glided through an enticement in undecided tints, with ashes-of-roses struggling for recognition. Upon the fitting, this fell from Seraltha's shoulders in princess form to a full train of accordeon plaiting, over which splashed double cascades of rich blonde laces that sprang from the low-turned collar in front, and, rippling in company over the bosom, parted beneath in drooping curves that swept around to the train in widening streams. Another cascade fell to the feet. Cascades also encircled the flowing sleeves, contrasting with the marble purity of her rounded arms, which were revealed well toward her elbows upon every movement. When this gown was completed and Seraltha stood before the mirror for a final approval, she folded her arms across her waist, holding the sleeves close with either hand. Madam Hitts smiled.

In the morning of the following Monday, the scissors wended their way through a bolt of black surah-silk. Upon the second fitting the skirt from this material showed faintly through

a front of graduated black chantilly flounces, headed with cord passementerie. The front was gored and drawn closely to the form, the full back falling gracefully to its length without adornment, yet finished at the bottom by a heavy black cord, which in its movements just escaped the touch of the carpet. Upon a final fitting this costume showed a basque, short over the hips and depending in points between, and ornamented harmoniously, yet in a manner defining the bust by a zouave effect in passementerie. Madam Hitts again overcame objections by reference to styles.

This costume having afterward become celebrated, the complete outfit will receive mention: An English walking hat of black straw, faced with velvet, edged with gilt, and adorned in front with black ostrich pompons, full *aigrette*, a plume springing from them and sweeping around the side. A half-face veil of black, dotted with gold; a parasol of black chantilly laces and a chatelaine satchel with oxidized silver hook and chain, depending from the waist.

## CHAPTER V.



STEAMER trunk rested in the driver's box of a carriage that stood by the rear porch of the house on Pine street, at ten o'clock of the morning preceding a reception of the Second Regiment (National Guard) officers, to be held at Monterey. Within it were seated Chalmer Grose, Seraltha Ames, and upon the front seat, with bundles beside her, Lethe St. Pier, acting lady's maid. Arriving at Third and Townsend streets, they found the waiting special train, being filled with resident soldiers (young fellows of the best society) noticing the ladies, vivacious maidens, also of the best society; lively matrons, society business men, who knew the world and did not notice the ladies in general, but, specifically, Colonel August Garrison, with staff, and Mrs. Katie Twohy. The Colonel knew everybody in the best society, and so did Mrs. Katie Twohy. With her greeting and

merry-making she hastened the time until the train was in motion and every seat of the car into which she had entered fully occupied, except the one that Lethe St. Pier had taken, which was turned to face Chalmer Grose and Seraltha. This she shared, greeting Chalmer Grose quite icily, and, while taking her seat, glanced inquiringly at his companion. He granted an introduction, also icy. Mrs. Katie Twohy then gave attention to the scenery outside the car.

She was blondish in complexion; her eyes were light blue and inspective, and her form girlish, although she was past thirty. Her manner was very positive. She had been twice divorced; but as she had been the plaintiff in both cases, and, from the results, had come into possession of a desirable property, her reputation was not in question and the best society continued in extending favors to her, which she accepted as her due, defining divorce: expiation for the sin of *mésalliance*.

Mrs. Katie Twohy stilled her immediate neighborhood by her silence during the entire journey, Chalmer Grose making a few pointless remarks to Seraltha, who responded timidly. The eyes opposite to her seemed at times to listen and then to speak. Only when Colonel August Garrison, who was imposing in stature, courteous and well-bred, came to escort her to the landing at Monterey, did Mrs. Katie Twohy again become cheerful.

The special train soon stood empty on its track, the passengers wending their several ways toward the hotel or to the beach. An English drag (two chestnut horses tandem) bore Chalmer Grose, Seraltha and her maid to the Hotel del Monte.

Delightful Monterey! The soft ocean zephyrs, pushed onward by glistening billows, fan the sanded shore and sob farewells through quivering palms. Linger near their azure birth-place, they steal behind the evergreens to caress the blushing pansies nestling on their beds, then stir the lawns with gentle touch and hasten up

the winding walks to greet the terraced roses waving their welcome from the upper slopes. With lulling whisper they flit among the groves of pine beyond, and, wearied, hide within the cypress groves, where trembling leaves send back an echo of falling tears. The rolling waves break on the sloping beach, and, baffled in their chase, fall back upon the ocean's breast in answering moan. The evening air holds essences of subtle power that whelm the soul and draw to arbored place and quiet nook. Mirth falls into pensive mood, hope dreams, and passion sighs. Alluring Monterey!

The afternoon sun shone upon merry groups clustered about the sands, upon lines of bathers in the surf; upon gay equipages speeding along the tide lines; upon quiet couples strolling about the grounds and into the hotel verandas. Within one of these, Mrs, Katie Twohy, Colonel August Garrison, and Nathan Rapps of the *Investigator*, sat in a semi-circle that opened toward and commanded a view of Chalmer Grose and Seraltha, who were seated near a



further column of the veranda, in conversation.

Nathan Rapps, known in newspaper circles as Nat Rapps, was allowed to feel at ease when in the company of Mrs. Katie Twohy. He was short in stature when standing, but when sitting he seemed to exceed the average man in height and bulk.

After a long conversation Mrs. Katie Twohy was heard to say:

“I have given you more information upon this subject, Mr. Rapps, than my observation might justify. Much may be surmised.”

“Mrs. Twohy,” responded the reporter, “if one learns more than the truth he gains the truth, so far as it has evolved, and surmise—pardon, Mrs. Twohy—clever surmise, is the mental region where further facts are found, and in which wisdom delves and gathers for its own. This thought reminds me of an experience: While driving in Golden Gate Park one Sunday afternoon last summer—no, the summer before—a team of grays passed me, speeding toward the Cliff. When a short distance in

advance of my position, the team suddenly halted, a lady stepped from the carriage and walked hastily to the lawn skirting the driveway. The grays were turned, bringing the carriage nearer to the place where she had halted. She stood awhile in conversation with some one within the carriage and shortly afterward re-entered it. It was a barouche, with drawn curtains. The outfit returned to the city. You see, she would not go to the Cliff; but if everything had been all right—as it should have been—she would not have been riding in the Park behind drawn curtains. I followed, and last summer, a year after, the *Investigator* published exclusively a full history of the tragedy — names, dates, circumstances, and causes—in the next morning's issue. He was shot at the Presidio, at nine o'clock of the evening before—you remember?"

As the application of this experience dawned upon the mind of Mrs. Katie Twohy, she sprang from her chair, and standing very near Colonel August Garrison, said, in a manner evidently

intended to be both impressive and resolute, but which lapsed, as she advanced in her speech, to the deference of a victim at bay before a superior animal:

"You have been—been—Mr. Rapps! you have no privilege to use society chat for professional purposes; besides you do not dare, and the *Investigator* dares not to profit by what I have told you. You would not, you could not, especially as I might be—be"—Here she came to a full stop. Nat Rapps hastened to answer:

"Certainly not. Society chat—also confidential. Certainly not. No intentions, such as you indicate. You interested me. I wandered into possibilities. The *Investigator* has no use for possibilities."

"Certainly not. Mr. Rapps never betrays confidences, Mrs. Twohy," said Colonel August Garrison, in confirmation. He afterward, at her request, escorted her toward the beach, giving profuse assurance that information which she had imparted to Nat Rapps would not be used in a professional way. Nevertheless, when they

had come to the beach, Mrs. Katie Twohy was seen to stamp her foot upon the damp sand. Nat Rapps put his feet upon the lower round of his chair and noticed the people upon the veranda, especially those near the further column. Presently Seraltha's maid appeared, and after a short conversation she went with her into the hotel, leaving Chalmer Grose sitting alone and evidently annoyed.

Discomfort to Chalmer Grose had entered the special train with Mrs. Kate Twohy. He had received her letter of regret years before, in response to an invitation to attend a reception at the house on Pine street.

Discomfort to him entered the Hotel del Monte with Nat Rapps. Especially was it active upon the veranda while that gentleman was in conversation with Mrs. Katie Twohy, and it became more oppressive when he saw that Rapps turned his attention toward the further column, and saw his feet sliding along the lower round of his chair as if in search of something hidden. Chalmer Grose had met Nat

Rapps aforetime, and knew that he was held by him in low esteem.

Discomfort took full possession of Chalmer Grose, while he conversed with Seraltha on the veranda and ventured to turn her thoughts into impure channels. The price paid for social companionship with her took the semblance of a squandered fortune when with modest apology she justified her acceptance of his invitation and denied an evil motive to her action. When she retired with her maid he turned his chair so that Nat Rapps might not see his face, and remained in meditation until dinner. Thereafter, through the festivities of the night, he entertained Seraltha by assuming the solicitude of an admiring friend, for her welfare and enjoyment.

In the evening the parlors and assembly rooms were filled with inspiring music, beautiful women, handsome men, rustling silks, silvery laughter, gallant compliments, and splendid ornaments. All of these adjectives, and

many more, besides names feminine and masculine, titles and occupations, Nat Rapps put upon his note book with pleasant comment.

After completing his notes and telegraphing to the *Investigator* a report of the Second Regiment reception, Nat Rapps went to the second story of the hotel and strolled about the corridors enclosing the suite of rooms occupied by Seraltha and her maid. He had passed the opened door of the parlor several times, hesitating as he did so, and was rewarded by the appearance of Lethe and an inquiry from her regarding the object of his search.

"I was under the impression, madam," he responded, "that this is the parlor reserved for Mrs. Katie Twohy, but not being positive, I hesitated. I ask your pardon, madam."

"Her suite is further down the hall, sir," answered Lethe, pleased with the smiling gentleman who had addressed her so courteously; "but she is below now, sir. I saw her go down awhile ago."

Nat Rapps expressed regrets because he had committed the error, and ventured to say:

"I can infer that you assist the beautiful lady in pearl silk who is admired by everyone in the parlors. I saw you with her in the tandem, driving to the hotel from the Special. She is charmingly attired. You must have had much society experience, madam."

"I have been with society people all my life, sir," responded Lethe, bowing an acknowledgment to his opinion.

"I have a sister, madam, married, very wealthy, always richly dressed, but never seems to have her gowns put on just right, like that of the lady in your charge to-night. If you are engaged satisfactorily she might, at least, advise with you to her advantage. She can afford to pay handsomely."

"I'm not waiting on ladies now, 'cept sometimes—"

"Then she could call upon you, certainly." He put this leader in very positively, although courteously.

“Yes—yes—she might, at my house.”

Soon afterward Nat Rapps went below and upon a page of his diary a paragraph appeared that included the number of the house on Pine street, the name of its occupant, and the names of Chalmer Grose and Seraltha Ames. He then joined in the festivities and moved as a guest until the ending.

When the special train arrived at Third and Townsend streets, San Francisco, the following afternoon, a carriage awaited it that bore away a steamer trunk and three passengers, as before. It was driven to the house on Pine street, and thence to the Hotel Havencourt, where Chalmer Grose alighted and retired to his rooms.

To the general observer, familiar with society affairs, this reception presented the same unchanging movements that had moulded the previous one, and others going before, to a pleasing monotony. Here a diamond flashing where before a pearl had rested; there a flushing bosom where before a maiden's bodice had spread its modest laces; colors where tints had



blended, or a void where a face had smiled, are all the variations noticed in these society reunions. This the familiar observer asserts and this the eye confirms. Yet beneath the penetration of sight are mighty happenings.

To Seraltha, Monterey was Epocha—a cloud behind, a sunburst beyond. Yonder, the common-place, the unrefined, “The Mission.” Now, and forever, the beautiful, the gentle, “the world.” Thoughts of her mother now held a phantasm, toiling for naught. True, this mother was cheerful, and in her youth had pleasures—at the lake side, near her home in Scotland, in the wood, and upon the meadows. With delight she had told of merry girls romping about the shores of secluded coves, or splashing through their shallow depths with unstockinged feet, holding the gown secure from a wetting; of laughing troops ranging the wood, begarlanded with leaves and flitting out with happy shouts to join in dances upon the sward.

These scenes, in Monterey, would spread the smile of scorn and tempt the jibe. Another

world! Her mother dwelt afar off in a receding distance, and shadows fell between them through which neither could ever pass. Not the shadow of scorn; love burned bright in the heart of the girl as in the mother's breast. Not shame; the daughter's snowy arm upheld to church and festival an uncomely form, grasping with knotted hand, toil seamed, and moved unconscious of superior worth; but shades of infinite potentiality, deep as that cast by Eden's forbidden tree—the shadows of the seminary and Monterey.



## CHAPTER VI.

**T**O Seraltha's use, Lethe St. Pier assigned the gorgeously-furnished chamber and connecting rooms in the house on Pine street. Lethe had feared that she would not give her consent to this, and that she would return to her occupation after the reception; but the shadow of Monterey had fallen upon Seraltha's soul, and all of life, except that phase portrayed by the fragment moving under the gaslights of the Hotel del Monte, seemed to her a scourge from which to flee. Knowing nothing of the ownership or the history of the house she accepted Lethe's hospitality.

She retired at an early hour, and awoke at sunrise, the accustomed time of her childhood. Looking about the room to verify her presence she yielded to the contentment that whelms the tired soul suddenly freed from the call of duty.

In a half somnolence she mingled the scenes at Monterey with fancies of the future in reasoning dreams that impressed their themes upon her willing thoughts until long after a full awakening: "He is experienced and spoke to try my strength. This is but right. He knows me not. He has tried my virtue and found it secure. I have parried the first attack. All men attack, as all the world knows. No woman charges heinous offence against him, who thus attacks, and, foiled, retreats, coming again in guise of love. He does love. He is now courteous, gentle and gives me deference. He now sees my better self and would possess it. This is his due. He will give to me, besides love, life's luxuries. He will anchor me to ease, secure from toil and forever away from 'The Mission.' "

It was midday when Seraltha entered the dining-room and found Lethe awaiting her with a dainty breakfast. During her repast a messenger rung the door-bell, which Lethe answered, returning with a note addressed to Seraltha. She unfolded it and read aloud:

“MISS SERALTHA:—

“Urgent business will prevent my call this evening, as arranged. I am much disappointed. I will call Saturday evening, instead, should you consent, by a return note handed to the messenger. I anticipate an enchanting visit when we meet again.

“Impatiently yours,

“CHALMER GROSE.”

“But Mr. Hyman will expect me at the ferry to go with him to Santa Rosa,” said Seraltha, turning to Lethe with an expression of inquiry upon her face.

“Must you meet Mr. Hyman?” asked Lethe.

“No!” responded Seraltha, and retiring to her room she wrote an answer of approval. Giving it to the messenger, she finished her breakfast and went to the parlors.

She put aside the curtains of the windows, caressing their silken folds. A gilded cage hung behind one, high against the window. She stood upon an ottoman and peered into it. Two love-birds lay beside the empty seed-cup,

dead. The frightened housekeeper had forgotten them. She stumbled from the ottoman to a sofa near by and reclined upon it, looking away from the scene. Presently she arose and summoned Lethe, who removed the starved love-birds and the gilded cage. After she had gone away, Seraltha stood by the window and looked up and down the street, then to the place where the cage had hung. Yellow and green feathers upon the window-sash glistened in the sunlight.

She hastened to her dressing-room and soon reappeared robed in the surah silk gown of graduated flounce and zouave effect. Firmly refusing Lethe's offer to provide a carriage for her use, she went upon the street and walked to Golden Gate Park.

She avoided the conservatory, passing around it by a secluded pathway to a rustic seat, shrinking within the shadows of a group of live oak. Partially screened from observation, she took a seat and looked out over the broad parkway stretching toward the ocean cliffs.

Many years had passed since Seraltha first selected this seat for observation of the things she could not possess. Sundays or during holiday outings, she shared it with her mother or with a school-mate—silent herself, but listening to the comments of her companion, and, with eyes deepening to violet, followed the movements of a beautiful saddle horse, or an elegant equipage.

More often alone, in the closing hours of the day, she would watch straggling teams that loomed up out of the mists and sped by her with whirring wheels. All those who then passed by were to her strange people. They were not of "The Mission."

To-day the violet eyes saw equals, moving with familiar purpose. One raised his hat to her, as he flashed by behind a foaming roadster geared to speed with socks and toe-weights. His arm had encircled her waist in a waltz at Monterey. A woman reined her span in swerving speed, passing the plodding landau and staid barouche, leaving broad scollops upon the

sanded roadway behind her calash. Seraltha had seen her in the centre of an admiring group at Monterey. Familiar faces crowded by, as if in a procession. With all their ambitions Seraltha's aspirations held even pace.

The rays of the sun had crept under the live-oaks before she left the rustic seat. Crossing a sloping lawn to a foot-path near the border of the driveway she strolled upon it to the principal entrance of the Park. Inviting street cars stood near by; but she entered a barouche the door of which was opened by a courteous liveryman. Seraltha was driven to the house on Pine street, where she remained until the time appointed for the visit of Chalmer Grose. He had received her note, which read:

“FRIDAY, 12 M.

“MR. CHALMER GROSE:—

“Please accept my regrets at not meeting you this evening, and my assurances that your appointed time is agreeable to me.

“Sincerely yours,

“SERALTHA AMES.”



That there were suggestions lurking within the sentences, which were not agreeable to the desires of Chalmer Grose, was shown by his impatient treatment of the missive after reading it. He crushed it in his hand, together with the envelope, and threw it on the floor; presently he picked up the note, and restoring it to its proper form, put it into a pocket of his waistcoat. In the evening, just before his departure to keep the appointment with Seraltha, he again read it.

A letter squares the conduct of a man toward a woman, when spoken words take no effect. In all her conversation at Monterey, Seraltha gave evidence that she firmly adhered to the path of honor; yet Chalmer Grose had not ceased to hope, that her behavior might belie her words—she might appear in the guise of the intriguer. The written expression of regret, although commonplace, bore evidence of character. But Seraltha's note promised nothing for the fortune he had squandered upon her. He had hoped for a response to the suggestions

in his note; when he saw that they were ignored, he was full of rage. What resulted, however, from a careful reading of the note, was a belief in Seraltha's integrity. During his visit with her his conduct was that of an honorable suitor.

When his visit was ended, he went down the stone stairway to Pine street. He stood awhile at the corner above the entrance, then turned into the side street and went up the steep driveway to the barn. He then passed along the causeway to the rear porch of the house. Here he met Lethe St. Pier, who conducted him into the family room, the door of which she bolted, and the two sat in conversation until a late hour.

During the following week, Seraltha received this letter:

“WEDNESDAY.

“DEAR MISS SERALTHA:—

“My interests compel me to spend a few days at mines owned by the Association of which I am the President.

"The mountains are very attractive at this time. I should be pleased if you could enjoy seeing them. A friend, who is also interested in mines, will go with me, accompanied by his wife. We shall establish our headquarters at a hotel in a neighboring city, and from there make occasional trips to the mines. My friend's wife is excellent company, and will be very much pleased to act as your chaperon. I shall also try my best to entertain you. I trust that you will grant our party the pleasure of your company. I will call upon you Saturday evening, and hope to be favored with your consent.

"Sincerely your friend,

"CHALMER GROSE."

Seraltha received this note an hour after her return from a visit to her mother. She wore the old suit of blemished brown, trimmed with new furs. She had not told her mother of the business in which she was now engaged, but left her in the belief that she was still in service as companion to an invalid lady whom she had attended during the preceding months; fearing that her mother might misunderstand her

motives and spoil her chance of realizing her aspirations.

The visit to her mother, the well-worn attire and the familiar scene of "The Mission," had partially restored Seraltha to her former self. The old had not wholly approved of the new; and when she read the letter of Chalmer Grose, it seemed to be filled with improprieties; but, when evening came, and the worn attire was laid aside for the ashes-of-roses gown, the dweller on Pine street assumed superiority over the one of "The Mission," and overcame arguments against the acceptance of this invitation. Lethe's advice was in the direction of consent, which was secured without the influence of her prophecies, to the veracity of which Seraltha yielded an increasing faith.

She accepted the proposal of Chalmer Grose on the occasion of his appointed visit, and, preparations being duly made, the party began the journey in the morning of the following Monday, travelling by rail.

The friend mentioned in the letter of invita-

tion, and who became one of the party, had formed an acquaintance with Chalmer Grose, several years previous to this time, under peculiar circumstances. He was then known about town as one of "The Three" from Calaveras.

In that trio he was the leader. He was taller, by half a head, than the others, they being of equal height, one distinguished by drooping shoulders and the other by excessive erectness.

Their former history is not essential to the purpose of this narrative; but within two years after their arrival at San Francisco, their triple appearance was noticed about the saloons. They were generally well dressed, impudent, and loudly overestimating the character of Calaveras. After a time they appeared to prosper, and the swell bars—even that of the Hotel Havencourt—were favored by their patronage. They dressed alike, or nearly so, in striped trousers, black sack coats and embroidered flannel shirts, heavy watch chains with seals, high-heeled boots, and low-crowned white hats. They habitually approached a saloon counter

in a certain order, the taller one leading the way, and the others following in oblique file, he of the drooping shoulders in the rear.

One evening, something transpired in the Hotel Havencourt which directed their activities into different channels. They had entered the bar-room in earnest conversation, and afterwards sat around the table of a wine-room near the bar. Here they were served by the bar-keeper, who did not close the door of the room when he came out. Standing near the end of the bar, and awaiting other customers, he heard the leader, who was called Hamilton Tucker, saying:

"It's as easy as picking it up. I'll double our money before 3 o'clock in the morning, and, Chance Neely, if you havn't got the sand to put in your share, draw it out and I'll play mine and Mun's." Here the voice of the speaker lowered. The barkeeper then moved cautiously nearer to the door.

"Hold on, Ham; go slow on your talk about sand," he heard Chance Neely say. "We have

been a good while piling up that three thousand, and we're adding something to it 'most every day. It won't be very long before we'll have enough to start a saloon on Market street; then we are 'the People.' That is what we was working for these four years; and now, when we're 'most there, I don't believe in taking chances, especially among men who have got dollars to our cents."

"They are just the folks to get in with," asserted Hamilton Tucker. "They don't hug their money. I saw—" here he tilted his chair backward and closed the door. The barkeeper could hear no more.

Two hours afterward the leader was sitting in the cinch-room of the Hotel Havencourt, with the combined capital of "The Three" in his pocket and upon the table before him. His entrance had been easily effected and his admittance to the game readily granted. The game ended as the gray light of the morning crept into the cinch-room. When Hamilton Tucker

stepped upon the sidewalk fronting the Hotel Havencourt, he was heard to groan.

Within the following week, Chance Neely had obtained a situation with a company of private detectives, and a month later betrayed the hiding place of a former friend, who was now under the shadow of the law; however, not before "The Three" had won every dollar he had at the gaming table. Munroe Chase, whom Hamilton Tucker had familiarly called "Mun," in the meantime, had accepted a situation as barkeeper in an uptown saloon with the pay of a novice. Hamilton Tucker lodged with him and partook of the luncheon spread in his employer's saloon for the enticement of customers, which favors the recipient shared with exceeding meekness, frequently telling his former partner that he was "all broke up."

"You must rustle up something," was the constant response of the new barkeeper, after which Hamilton Tucker would wander upon the streets.

These rambles often included a visit to the



Hotel Havencourt, where he would walk along the corridor until the door of the cinch-room came within his sight. Here he would halt and, for a moment, look intently at the door, then turn back, walk hastily out of the hotel and resume his rambles on the street.

Upon one of these occasions, Chalmer Grose met him in the corridor, and, greeting him cordially, asked about his health and enjoyments. Chalmer Grose was one of the party whose superior skill had brought disaster to "The Three," and Hamilton Tucker, not being a natural gambler, although experienced, told him of the results of their previous meeting, and cheerfully accepted his sympathy. The conversation in the corridor resulted in his employment, at first as overseer of his employer's stock and stables, afterwards as special messenger to his mines and ranch, and still later, his fidelity being then above suspicion, as a trusted agent in matters requiring secrecy and strict obedience to orders. It was he who dropped the package of gold within the doorway of the hut in the glen, hast-

ening away in the darkness to prevent recognition, and it was he who wrote:

“Chalmer Grose and Lady,”

“Hamilton Tucker and Lady,”

upon the register of the principal hotel in a mountain city that nestled in the shadow of spurs, upon the slopes of which the mines of the S. N. M. A. were situated.

The party arrived at the mining town at nine o'clock of the morning following their departure from San Francisco. In the hotel Chalmer Grose found a letter addressed to him by the superintendent of a mine. This letter requested the President to visit a distant mine upon the earliest date possible, an accident having happened that placed much property in danger of loss. This news was received by Chalmer Grose with impatience, for when he finished the reading, he struck his hand upon the counter of the hotel office with a force that drew the attention of Hamilton Tucker, who, after escorting the ladies to the parlor and writing on the the register, had become engaged in reading

sundry athletic and dramatic posters that hung against the walls. He approached his employer, who gave him the letter to read.

"Twenty-two miles, and a rough road," said Hamilton Tucker, after reading; and, looking out through a window toward a distant spur rising above the others, he added: "It will take until sundown to climb it with the best team in this town."

"No accommodations there for the women?" said Chalmer Grose, in a tone of mingled disappointment and inquiry.

"Not a bunk on the slope, except in the miners' corral," the other replied.

After a consultation, they went to the parlor and informed Seraltha and her chaperon of the summons to the distant mine, and that their absence in response to it would be continued to the late afternoon of the next day. They also suggested methods of entertainment until they should return. Seraltha expressed much regret, but noticed that her chaperon received the information and suggestions with indifference.

This was also remarked by Hamilton Tucker, who called her aside and conversed with her in an undertone.

After a hasty breakfast, Chalmer Grose and Hamilton Tucker started upon their trip to the mine in an open mountain wagon, behind a team of black roadsters. The driver, who was muscular and florid, pushed a heavy pine box under his seat just before he mounted.

Seraltha and her chaperon had occupied a drawing-room of the sleeping car in which the party rode to the mountain city. Their journey had consumed the time of a day and the succeeding night. The two men, whose berths were in the open part of the car, had given gallant attention to their entertainment throughout the day, and bade them good night at an early hour of the evening, retiring to the smoking-room for the enjoyment of cigars and chats with traveling acquaintances. Shut away from other companionship in the seclusion of the drawing-room, each woman spread the meshes of inquiry by which to snare the character of the

other. In this the elder manifested rare skill. She was several years older than Hamilton Tucker—Seraltha had noticed the disparity of ages—and slightly wrinkled about the corners of her dark gray eyes. Faint tracings appeared also upon the curves of her full lips, and over her broad dimpled chin. Closer observation showed similar lines shadowed by soft black hair, that pointed upon the middle of a low forehead and receded in heavy waves over either side, sharply contrasting with the creamy whiteness of her face and neck, which was, at times, relieved by a slight flush spreading across her cheeks. In conversation the outlines of her rounded form moved in sympathy with her speech and seemed to hold caresses in waiting.

She had won Seraltha's admiration during the day. An hour of exclusive companionship in the drawing-room was sufficient to secure her confidence, and, artfully prompted by speech and gesture, Seraltha told, at first of Monterey, of its beauties, and of the grand reception, then of her aspirations to become one of those who

might dwell in higher places without fear of overthrow. While speaking of Monterey, the contrast—"The Mission"—came to her thought, and Seraltha told of childhood's poverty; of girlhood struggles to endow herself with decent attire and provide for mental needs; of uncouth neighbors, primed in boorish narrative; of uncongenial suitors, striving to win an unwilling bride and perpetuate her discontent. Her confidence increasing with its overflow, she told of Chalmer Grose, of his growing love and admiration, and insinuating that her youth and beauty were but an even compensation for the higher place in life that he could give to her.

To Seraltha's later confidences her companion had made no response, and now she silently began her preparations for retiring. When both were in their berths, Seraltha said to her companion :

"Good-night, Mrs. Tucker!"

"Not that! Call me Hermina, always! Good-night! I must sleep," was the response from the opposite berth.

Was it a groan of the engine, toiling around the curves on the steep grade of the mountain gorge; or was it a breath of the night wind sweeping down through the pines above upon the moving train? A low sound, not of the rumbling wheels, nor of the grinding brakes, filled the air in the drawing-room of the sleeping car, and moaned, and moaned.



## CHAPTER VII.



PORTION of the canyon through which Chalmer Grose must pass, to approach the mine designated in the letter of the Superintendent, presented scenery remarkable for diversity. The entrance opened toward the city from the east, presenting to the view an expanse of pasture land, narrowing to a distant point against pine-covered peaks. It was interspersed with groups of low trees and strips of chaparral that bent around the curves of a mountain stream, lining the roadway from its source near the mine to the principal street of the city. Beyond the peaks a narrow, precipitous pass sprang upward, opening into a plateau covered with boulders of fantastic shapes and variegated tints, the plateau, surrounded by receding cliffs, terraced to the mists that crept over their verdureless summits. The mingled stream and roadway led through this wilderness to another nar-



row pass leading upward to the banks of a small, oblong lake, confined by the masonry of nature and bordered by groves of pine that mounted the slopes upon either side.

Beyond, the roadway made a sharp ascent against the face of a cliff, winding around its projection and reaching an altitude of three hundred feet. Beneath that point, a series of rapids and waterfalls, with alternating plunge and rush, foamed down the deep, narrow gorge that gradually widened in its descent, and in which, their tops brushing against the narrow roadway, grew pine and other large trees. Beyond these cascades the canyon opened into a broad plain, shaded by oak and chaparral. Cattle grazed about and upon the edge of the upper slope of the plain.

Near a gorge opening to the heights above stood a log house, long and low, with out-houses in the rear. This house marked the half-way point between the city and the mine; in it the traveler found rude comforts and fiery liquors. Stories were told in the city of dark deeds per-

petrated hereabout in earlier days; but no evidence of them now remained.

A heavy grade, ascending over a stony road strewn with fragments of ore that were shaken from the carts on their way to smelters in the city, was the only feature that attracted the attention of the traveler after leaving the range house; and this rose before him with increasing steepness to the entrance of the mine.

Chalmer Grose and his companion arrived at the mine just as the pines were merging into the twilight shadows of the peaks. After supper and a long consultation with the Superintendent, they accepted the miner's accommodations for the night. The driver spread blankets upon the bed of the mountain wagon, and, after many visits to the pine box, drew the canvas aprons of the seats over himself and slept until aroused at 11 o'clock the next day by Hamilton Tucker, who, with Chalmer Grose, had made an examination of the mine, and who now ordered the driver to have the team ready within an hour for a return to the city. The driver's prep-

arations for the journey included frequent visits to the pine box, and immediately after their dinner the party began a rapid descent of the mountain.

After the departure of Chalmer Grose and his companion from the hotel, the ladies took joint possession of one of the two suites of rooms reserved for the party. Hermina said:

“I am unhappy; let us drive.”

Driving in company was one of the methods suggested by Chalmer Grose for their entertainment during his absence. He had also told them to select a steady horse, and to avoid dangerous routes.

An hour later, Hermina and Seraltha, the former holding the reins, were seated in a phaeton drawn by a spirited horse. Turning from a street, Hermina drove into the roadway leading to the mine. Seraltha had strongly protested against the use of this horse, for Hermina was a reckless driver, and even now was driving with unusual speed. Seraltha urged her to rein in the horse; but Hermina, her cheeks reddened

by the wind, and her eyes lustrous with excitement, cried:

“If he could fly it would be better for us—for you! I would turn him from the mountains toward the ocean, and guide him to its most furious storms, that we might perish.”

Seeing alarm depicted in Seraltha's face, caused by those desperate words, Hermina hastened to say:

“Never fear; there is no danger. I am only despondent, and would fly away from it. I have driven him often and far up this canyon. My own despondency dictated the words I uttered awhile ago. This canyon is an imagery of my life, and may be of your future. All that you now see is beautiful; the city with its pleasures, over there; here about us, and up to yonder peaks, rich verdure, flowers and sparkling stream; beyond—well, go with me. Be not afraid. You will be in little danger. Few women die when they should.”

They were now midway between the city and the point of verdure that disappeared against

the peaks. The horse had slowed his pace to a steady amble as the phaeton ascended the grade.

"I was assured," responded Seraltha, "that this was to be a pleasure trip, and that you—you are so different from your ways of yesterday, Mrs.—Hermina—and—"

"And, you are not what I supposed you to be. Seraltha, you are a good woman! How long have you known him?"

The question expressed by the grey eyes of Hermina was more potent to compel an answer, as they looked steadily into Seraltha's face, than the words from her lips. "How long have you known him?" the eyes asked.

"Not a month," answered Seraltha.

A painful heat entered her body and crept upward, burning her cheeks and ears.

"And that time has been pleasant, like the scenery below and about us?" the eyes inquired again.

"Yes," answered Seraltha.

“ Filled also with anticipations of a beautiful future, charming as the view before us? ”

Seraltha's eyes were now turned toward the landscape, directed from point to point. Hermina's queries displeased her, for she fancied that they bore an undertone of sarcasm. The grey eyes could not look into her face, and she made no response.

After a long silence, during which they had arrived near the precipitous pass beyond the peaks, and could hear the stream rushing over the flinty roadway, Hermina said:

“ The beauties below are yours. They were mine. I have known him seven years.”

They had reached the Pass. The horse tossed his head as if assenting to the task before him, and hastened up the declivity, giving no heed to the foaming water by his side and about his feet. Seraltha shrunk close to Hermina during the ascent, and closer when they reached the height and she looked upon the tinted desolation of the rocky plateau, and

upward toward the mist that hung over the receding cliff above.

"A wilderness like this is now in my soul," said Hermina.

She turned the horse upon a broad, flat rock that underlaid the stream, and extended beyond its edge with a gentle upward slope. Seraltha moved away from her, and made no response. Hermina pointed toward a group of rocks resting each against the other and against the base of the distant cliff upon her right, and resumed:

"That seems a grotto, its face festooned with broad tinted ribbons of lilac and saffron. Within is spread a couch, its canopy of sapphire, its yellow coverlet dropping thick folds on emerald rugs. It seems a place of warmth and beauty, its stillness inviting and tranquilizing. I went there once and stood within that grotto. I sat upon the couch. The tinted ribbons that festoon its face are dull crumbling flakes of rotting stone, the sapphire canopy a dingy rock, and the yellow coverlet a damp sand heap beyond a slimy pool in which newts glide hither and

thither. Ah! dear; distance beguiles the view! Thus all my pleasures hoped for proved illusory."

Failing to interpret her meaning, Seraltha said:

"Do you love him?" and impetuously continued: "You have no right to that. You *should* be unhappy. You should *love your husband*."

"Hush! he is my husband in name only. He married me for gold, and I—I was to be cast aside by Chalmer Grose; yet he gave a trifle from his wealth, so that I might be called 'wife' instead of 'wanton.' He purchased a husband for me. Seraltha, do you comprehend?"

To Seraltha the receding cliffs seemed slowly closing above, overhanging and about to fall; the rocks upon the plateau drew near around her, and flashed tints in kaleidoscopic circles within her darkening vision. The gasping breath and the hands reaching toward the water splashing by them, told Hermina that she was understood. But, when Seraltha began to rea-



son upon what she heard, doubts regarding the integrity of her companion came to her.

Few women give another one credit for honesty of purpose in that information which disturbs ambition; inexperienced women never do. The conceit of knowledge from the promptings of that favored deceiver, intuition, blinds argument and wrecks their judgment. Facts become fallacies, and advice impertinence. Yet she listened while Hermina continued:

“I will tell you—but first let us leave this hideous place.”

She turned the horse upon the flat stone, and, driving through the plateau, stopped at the oblong lake. The beauties of this mountain gem were unnoticed by them. The sparkling water reflected light that deepened the faint wrinkles upon Hermina's face, and there were tears in her eyes, when she turned toward Seraltha.

“My life was like yours before I met him,” she said. “When you unveiled your life and aspirations to me in the sleeping-car, I saw

myself in the purity of girlhood, beset by all the dangers which, unavowed, have made my life like the hideous place behind us. We, who were born in lowly homes, and endowed only with health and beauty, yet having the benefits of education, tread the hunting grounds of designing men. We are sought, we know not why, until we have been ensnared. We exemplify a fable. We are yet of the pheasant while we trill the notes of the nightingale. 'Be cautious!' our parents call to us. But where is the danger? Flowers seem to cover the pathway; but they overhang pitfalls and smile alluringly. Do they tell us who would make us their prey? With kindly words they lure us along pleasant paths to our doom. Just where you are I was, seven years ago."

The tears increased their flow as she uttered the last sentence. She bent her face over her lap, and they fell fast upon the carriage robe. A gust from the mountain breeze swept over the cliffs, and dropped through the pines about the tiny lake, bearing a sigh over its ruffled surface

that breathed the heartaches of seven shameful years.

When in the sleeping-car Seraltha had an irresistible desire to speak of all within her heart. She now felt the same potency of command from the despairing woman, who bent her head over the carriage robe and, without speech, demanded silence; yet, within her being, she felt the impulse, born when the world was young, to pour blame upon a woman's weakness even at a time when she was struggling in the agonies of memory. Had Hermina looked into the violet eyes of her companion at this instant she would have seen resentment and condemnation; and, had she asked for sympathy, she would have heard the unjust words with which women have agonized the souls of their sister women through the ages: "You tempted him."

When the tears had brought relief, Hermina raised her head and continued: "I had finished my studies at an academy. My father had toiled and my mother saved, so that I might remain to the end of the course. Soon afterward I met

him—Chalmer Grose. Where I should have resented, I forgave; and where I should have refused, I assented. The reputation of sin was upon me, while I was yet pure. It is but a step from disrepute to impurity—one suggests the other. I took that course, and *you* may.”

Seraltha grasped the arm of her companion and angrily exclaimed: “I have *honor*, Mrs. Tucker! No, this is a word you could not say. This word is a woman’s shield.”

Hermina earnestly responded:

“Men seek to break this shield. But there is another word of mighty power, the definition of which is not in language, but in the soul of her who hears, and of him who speaks it. In her it may be glorified with a heavenly meaning; by him it may be spoken in lust; yet, when he utters this word, her soul reads its own tablets, and while it reads, her shield is broken and her weapon turned aside. This word is—Love.”

The force of these sentences was lost upon Seraltha, whose heart had hardened against the one whom she now believed to be a weakling

attempting to discourage an ambition which she herself had failed to gratify. Yet Seraltha made no response. She released Hermina's arm and reclined against the cushioned back of the phaeton seat. Absorbed in thoughts of the past, Hermina continued, still looking upon the lake:

"After defeat, the flowers never smile, the fields are never beautiful and the forests are ever gloomy. The humble home, once despised, now seems to have been a paradise, and"—— A movement of her companion caused Hermina to look toward her.

Fully impressed with a belief that weakness of purpose was the cause of Hermina's downfall, and that her present intentions were to turn aside one who might win a husband where she had failed, Seraltha determined to close a conversation that had become annoying to her.

The movement that drew Hermina's attention was a sudden straightening of Seraltha's body from its reclining position to one of rigid uprightness, facing toward her. What Hermina saw, when she turned her head, were violet eyes,

deepening in hue while she looked upon them, and a white face expressing a mingling of pity and determination. She had spoken as to a confiding girl, but now a woman confronted her with visible self-reliance, and no words were needed to know her wishes.

Hermina quickly gathered the reins and turned the horse on the road. She drove carefully across the rocky plateau and down the precipitous pass, but when they had entered the grassy opening of the canyon she drew the reins tightly and urged the horse to his utmost speed. Seraltha looked apprehensively at the speeding animal until within sight of the hotel and heaved a sigh of relief as she stepped from the phaeton.



## CHAPTER VIII.



BROKEN tire was seen by Hamilton Tucker to be slipping away from one of the forward wheels of the mountain wagon, and before he could make the driver halt it escaped from its place and rolled down the steep grade of the stony road, just beyond the log house of the cattle range. Chalmer Grose had urged the driver to increasing speed several times during the descent from the mine, and when the log house came in view this speed had reached the danger point. The driver, who seemed to share the impatience of his passenger, was quite careless in his driving, for the wheels had struck several projecting rocks.

The tire and the wagon came to a full stop, the one from striking against one of these projections, the other from the efforts of Hamilton Tucker, who shot his full length over the driver and pushed the foot-brake taut with his hand.

Chalmer Grose, in the meantime—the noise from the clattering tire having warned him of the situation—kept his position by grasping the seat with both hands.

When the team was brought to a halt, Hamilton Tucker clambered out to make a survey of the damages. The wheel was not broken, but it could not be used until the tire was welded and re-set. He solved this problem after a visit to the log house below. Having discovered tools in one of the out-houses he went to the dwelling for assistance; but a woman, who appeared at the door, informed him that all the men of the range had gone to the city. He had often witnessed the operation of setting tires, the woman readily granted permission to use the appliances on the place, besides extending an invitation to partake of the contents of any of the bottles that he saw in rows upon shelves behind a rude counter. Declining the latter courtesy, he returned to the scene of the accident, and with cheering words directed the drawing of the wagon to the shop. By the combined efforts of



the three travelers the tire was firmly set, Hamilton Tucker performing the more difficult part of the work. "I am a natural blacksmith," he asserted with pride, striking the set tire a sharp rap with the hammer.

The travelers then took their places in the wagon and the willing team sped down the smooth road of the oak-dotted plain. It was evident that the will of the driver was in harmony with the desire of his passengers to reach the city before sunset, for he constantly urged the horses to greater speed. During the time in which the repairs were being made, he had frequently refreshed himself from the bottles on the shelves behind the counter in the house.

An hour before sunset Seraltha Ames, who was on an upper balcony of the hotel, looking out over the opening of the canyon, saw an object come forth from the shadow of the peaks near the precipitous pass and slowly advance toward the city. Although the nature of this object was not discernible, because of the distance, she observed that it did not keep to the

roadway, but advanced in a direct line. It came down the opening and disappeared among the groups of low trees that thickly dotted the side of the canyon. She again gave attention to the point of verdure narrowing to the Pass.

Her association with Hermina had become wearisome. This seemed to be mutual, for Hermina had found an interesting book and was now reclining on a sofa in her chamber, engaged in reading it. Seraltha had at first gone out to the balcony of the floor upon which their suite was situated and noticed the people passing in the street. Tiring of this, she went to the highest balcony, where she obtained a full view of the opening to the canyon, and hoped for the appearance of Chalmer Grose and his party.

Her thoughts, while waiting and watching, dwelt upon Monterey and the reception, upon the house on Pine street and its pleasant parlors. She then, in thought, saw a palace upon a western hill of San Francisco, overlooking the ocean and the bay, and splendid as the home of a princess. This surely could be, her thoughts

declared; for the man who was coming toward her from the mountains had the power to create, even more marvelous than the structure of her reverie. If he loved her this would be. He *must* love; it could not be otherwise. She was pure—no man had ever touched her lips; beautiful, surpassing any at Monterey; youthful—Hermína's words flashed into her thoughts: "By him it may be spoken in lust." She put her whole being against the thought; her soul repelled it; her reason seized it and pushed it out. "She could love him." No doubts mingled with this thought. "A woman would be less than her sex who could not love the man who delivered her from the weariness of poverty to the animation of——"

The thought was never completed. She sprang from her seat, and, placing both hands upon a rail of the balustrade, she bent far forward to bring her eyes nearer to what she now plainly saw moving upon the roadway, far down the opening of the canyon.

A half hour had passed since the object

which she had been unable to define disappeared among the trees. During that time it had moved unseen, coming suddenly into view from behind a long strip of chaparral that stood half way between the hotel and the peaks, one mile from either. The sinking sun now threw its rays upon the object, which at first appeared a glistening black; but as it moved upon a curve of the roadway, shimmering bands of crimson mingled with the black in flashing contrast. Sometimes it wavered, as if about to fall, and again advanced vigorously, then retarded its movements, but always appeared as if stumbling or hobbling. As it approached nearer, something that seemed to be a burden showed upon its back, secured by heavy bands. Nearer, the heavy bands dragged their ends upon the ground, and the crimson deepened in the rays of the setting sun.

There are things that shut the light from the eyes of the strongest women.

The woman in the balcony covered her face with her hands, reeled, and fell to the floor.

No one was near to aid her; but she soon revived, so that she was able to walk. Slowly she left the place and went down the stairway to the chamber in which Hermina was reading. She touched her upon the shoulder. Hermina looked up and saw a face ghastly in its pallor and white lips moving in stifled speech. The only words audible were: "The horse!" Seraltha repeated the words and then turned away as if dazed or stunned, yet conscious that Hermina could not comprehend. She groped her way to the office of the hotel.

Men had gathered there after business hours, who were laughing and chatting. She walked among them and the room became silent.

"The horse! the horse!" she exclaimed with stifled voice. The men looked at her in astonishment. No one responded. Her white lips moved in other speech, but "The horse! the horse!" were the only words they heard. Suddenly, with hands upraised and sight straining out through a window, she again reeled and fell to the floor. The sound of footsteps hastening

along the sidewalk drew attention from her to the street, and there a story of calamity was read at a glance.

A black horse of the team that went up the canyon in the morning of the previous day hobbled slowly along the pavement of the street toward the stables of the hotel. Cruel gashes, bordered by deeper scarlet, seamed his glossy blackness. A thick pine branch had driven its splintered end under his collar, piercing the arch of his neck and holding its green boughs over his back. The broad leather traces dragged upon the ground.

"The Cascades!" exclaimed a hostler, who met the wounded horse at the entrance of the stables. "The Cascades!" echoed a voice far back in the crowd that had pressed around him. "The Cascades! The Cascades!" was shouted along the street and into the office of the hotel.

"The Cascades?" gasped Seraltha, as men raised her from the floor and supported her to a seat. She repeated the words in response to the voices in the street; then, looking among

the faces of those who had gathered about her, from one to another, she asked, pleadingly, "Is it a dreadful place? The horse! Will he die? Can nothing live that—that—? Is it very deep? Is it water? Is it rock? The Cascades! Can no one escape? Is he"—her head bent forward and through the trembling hands that now covered her face tears fell, and a smothered word struggled out with them—"dead?"

The faces made no response, but sympathetic hands aided her to her chamber, where she asked to be left alone.

No sound of voices on the street had reached the seclusion of Hermina's chamber. She continued to read, fully interested in the pleasing book.

The hasty work of the stablemen had brought before the entrance of the hotel two sturdy teams attached to mountain wagons, like that in which Chalmer Grose had driven to the mine, except that one was longer. From this the two hindmost seats had been removed, and blankets, mattresses and straw filled the box. The driver had

brought lanterns from the stables and hung them against his seat. The driver of the other wagon took cases, packages and splints from two surgeons who stood upon the sidewalk, and who immediately afterward put on heavy overcoats and hastily climbed to the seat behind him.

The two sturdy teams galloped swiftly toward the opening of the canyon, men on horseback competing in the race. The clatter of hoofs and the crack of the drivers' whips sounded fainter and fainter in the distance, and then all was still about the hotel—still as the chamber where a woman wept silently.





## CHAPTER IX.

**D**EATH awaited beside a pleasant home in Santa Rosa, to enter and touch the wife of Abel Hyman. A husband's strong arm was already drawing her face to his, so that he might hear her whispered words. His great heart gave solace in words of strength and hope; hope to her that she might recover, as she had done before; words of strength that he might himself hear, for aid to hold the wailings of sorrow that filled his soul, to keep them there until a time when she could not hear.

Death came and stayed her breath while these faltering words were still upon her lips:

“Seraltha—love her—and”—

Abel Hyman was alone.

His wife had been an invalid for many years; and had often approached very near to death, but had revived to a measure of strength. Especially was this frequent during the years

in which Seraltha gave her companionship as compensation for a home while in attendance at the seminary. Although showing a constant affection for Seraltha, when these greater illnesses came upon her, Mrs. Hyman disclosed a love deeper than that of companionship, yet not that of a mother. In her helpless hours she had, in meditation, looked onward to the goodly company awaiting her, and in her thoughts would sit amidst it and see the one whom she had left behind, as he moved about his desolate home in loneliness. Then love would breathe wishes that his life might be cheered by the companionship of another, and when she felt herself sinking, she would ask that Seraltha might be with her to hear her last words.

Question not, ye women who have never felt the overflowing love from a noble soul sweeping away your self-preference. You can never comprehend. The heart of the woman who has felt this overflow holds impulses that reason knows not of.

Seraltha had not made the promised visit, and

no word from her had been received at Santa Rosa. During the day preceding that upon which Mrs. Hyman died, two messengers were sent to the city, instructed to find her. One went to the house of her mother, another to the home of the invalid lady, to whom Seraltha had been long in service. When these two met, after their vain search, one reported that her mother had directed him to the home of the invalid lady, who told the other messenger that Seraltha was with her mother. After consultation the two messengers went to the house of her mother, and with their information and surmises so frightened Mrs. Ames, that she hastened to visit the invalid lady, who multiplied her fears by allusion to recent newspaper accounts of mysterious disappearances, of elopements and of suicides. She advised Mrs. Ames to go directly to the Central Police Station for further information. Unable to give this, the officers suggested that she advertise in the daily papers for her missing daughter.

This advertisement appeared in the evening

papers, and was also displayed by the *Investigator* in its morning issue:

“Seraltha, where are you? Come to your mother.”

An obliging clerk in attendance at the first office that she entered suggested other forms; but Mrs. Ames, brushing away tears, insisted upon this as being a full expression of what was uppermost in her heart.

Nat Rapps was looking over “the paper” while awaiting breakfast at a fashionable family hotel, situated among the western hills near the most pretentious residences of best society. He had ordered generously and had placed his feet upon the lower round of his chair, to aid in his coming gratification. Something in the paper fixed his attention. His feet dropped from their resting-place and remained suspended for an instant, while he folded his paper and then hurriedly left the room.

The waiter, who arrived soon afterward bearing Nat Rapps’ breakfast, remarked to another who stood beside an opposite table:

“Dis de foug time dis same thing happen since I’s been on dis table, jes’ two weeks day fo’ yisterday.”

A few moments later Nat Rapps rang the door bell of the house on Pine street. The door was soon opened by Lethe St. Pier, who looked at him suspiciously; but after recognizing him as the courteous gentleman of Monterey, whose sister could not dress properly, she admitted him graciously.

“My sister, madam,” he said immediately after being seated, “has insisted that I should wait upon you and inquire if you can assist her at a reception to be given to an eminent literary gentleman at the Hotel Havencourt next month. I told her of the beautifully dressed young lady who was at the reception at Monterey—Miss Ames. I was introduced to her. A lovely lady, besides being charmingly dressed; and my sister insists that I shall beg you not to refuse. Her husband is very wealthy, and she can pay well—even more—for your assistance.” With some hesitation Lethe answered: “May be, Miss Se-

raltha will attend the same reception. If she does she will want me to wait on her."

"Miss Seraltha? Yes! That would be unfortunate for my sister. Can you ask Miss Seraltha if she is to attend? The invitations have been out several days."

"She is away from the city, sir."

"A letter would reach her."

"She is in the mountains."

"The mails go everywhere. A letter would certainly find her. My sister will pay you well—even more," persisted Nat Rapps.

"I don't know the name of the place—only the names of some of the mines," said Lethe, whose self-possession was disturbed by the consideration of an impossible letter.

"The El Dorado Consolidated, perhaps? A postoffice right by them," responded Nat Rapps, encouragingly.

"No. The Hardstone and the Consolation."

"Nevada!" exclaimed Nat Rapps.

"Nevada?" echoed Lethe. "I don't know."

"Went with a party," asserted Nat Rapps, quietly.

"Yes."

"Pity to disturb her with letters. My sister is unfortunate."

"She will be at home in a week; then I can ask her about it," said Lethe, with a glance of eagerness.

"Can't tell. They may decide to stay a month when they arrive there."

"No. Mr. Chalmer Grose said they would come back in ten days—foh shuah."

In the instant that Lethe spoke the name of Chalmer Grose, she became agitated. Nat Rapps gave no visible attention to this, nor to the fact that she had used the name, but prepared for departure, saying: "My sister will be disappointed, but she could not wait ten days before securing assistance. Must be secured at least two weeks before the reception. You understand about such things. You will meet her, though, in the future. She wants assistance frequently. I will call upon you hereafter, when she does."

Nat Rapps went from the house on Pine street to the offices of the S. N. M. A., where he gained information of the whereabouts of Chalmer Grose. He afterward put upon his diary:

“Seraltha found. Nine A. M.”

With anxious heart Mrs. Ames passed the forenoon of this day by looking out at the window toward the street, except, at times, when she would go to the sidewalk and strain her sight along its distance upon either hand, then walk to the adjacent corners and look up and down other streets. Returning to her cottage, she sat with folded hands, still looking out at the window, and strove to quiet her fears by thoughts upon possibilities.

Perhaps Seraltha had found another place, with some other invalid lady, to whom she was now giving companionship, and had forgotten to tell her mother of the change. Perhaps—blessed word, that brings to doubt sweet sentences of cheer, even so that the gates of heaven may be seen through sinfulness. Its suggestions gave her hope until time passed the noon-



hour, and the thought came to her of the wickedness in a great city. "Perhaps"—ominous word, that increases the terrors of doubt, even to a certainty of evil.

She hastily prepared for walking, and during the afternoon called at all places where Seraltha might visit, but found no information. Returning to her home in the evening, and finding it desolate, she went again to the office of the *Investigator* for the purpose of inserting another advertisement. While she was there a group of men stood behind the counter of the office, discussing information received by a telegram. Nat Rapps stood among these, and after conclusions were reached regarding future action upon the information, he turned away from the others and approached the counter.

When a clerk had written the advertisement, Nat Rapps saw the name "Seraltha" upon it.

"You are her mother," said he, addressing Mrs. Ames in undertone.

"Yes, sir."

"Seraltha is found," he said, and leaning over

the counter he touched her hand as she uttered an exclamation. "Hush! Not here! Say no word. She wants you. Wants you immediately. She is in the mountains. Hush!" This checked another exclamation. "The train that will take you to her leaves within an hour. I am going there. You will go with me. She wants you. The *Investigator* will bear your expenses. Do not ask me any questions. I cannot answer them, but you must go with me. Seraltha wants you. You will see her to-morrow."

A carriage came to the door soon afterward and stood in waiting. Nat Rapps passed out from behind the counter and assisted the bewildered woman into it. Arriving at the train, he secured an apartment for her in a sleeping car. For his own accommodation he selected a day car. Within an hour thereafter he was full asleep upon opened seats, and the train was speeding toward the mountain city. Before he slept he drew a paper from his pocket and in the dim light from the oil lamps above him, he read the telegram received by the *Investigator*:

“ ——— CITY, WEDNESDAY, ———, 8 P. M.

“ INVESTIGATOR,

“ *San Francisco :*

“ A horse, grievously wounded by falling through trees and over rocks, hobbled into this city at sunset. He is of a team that was driven into the mountains by Mr. Chalmer Grose, President of the Sierra Nevada Mining Association, who, with others, came here yesterday morning, and left soon after to visit a mine upon one of the upper slopes. The condition of the horse and his harness indicates a plunge over the cliff above the Cascades of ——— Canyon, together with the wagon in which the party rode. The roadway at one point is three hundred feet above the Cascades, and is in all places high, narrow and dangerous. It is feared that there are no survivors of a terrible catastrophe, except this horse. A relief party, with surgeons and their appliances, has gone into the mountains.

“ OPERATOR, WESTERN UNION.”



## CHAPTER X.

“**H**ERE’S more trouble,” exclaimed Hamilton Tucker, soon after Nat Rapps wrote his name and that of Mrs. Ames on the register of the mountain-city hotel. He had been busily engaged during the entire day in the construction of answers to telegrams of anxious inquiry from San Francisco and other places, regarding the accident at the Cascades. This strain upon his mind, together with the labor of going many times to a suite of rooms in the second story of the hotel, and making journeys to the telegraph office, had brought upon him much fatigue. He stood in a leaning attitude against the counter of the hotel office for a partial rest, when passengers from the evening express train came into the room. He was thus standing while Nat Rapps wrote on the register. From his position he saw the names plainly. He immediately went away from the counter to

the farther end of the office and dropped wearily into a chair. It was here that the assertion relating to additional trouble was made, and it was here that he drew his hat over his eyes and feigned sleep as Nat Rapps approached him, after a conversation with the clerk of the hotel and a hasty examination of recent entries on the register. During this time Mrs. Ames was conducted to the floor above by a bell-boy.

A speedy employment of time, besides the gaining of full information, was essential to the purposes of Nat Rapps, for the *Investigator* should be in receipt of his report at midnight. He approached Hamilton Tucker and tapped him gently on the arm.

"Nat Rapps, of the *Investigator*," said the reporter, as Hamilton Tucker raised his hat in response.

"After news?" asserted Hamilton Tucker, who buttoned his coat over his chest.

"Information, Mr. Tucker—reliable information. Prominent man is Mr. Chalmer Grose. The *Investigator* is very discreet."

“You want to make a sensation. I have telegraphed everything to friends. Nothing more to say. Don’t want a great ado made over it—he don’t. He got hurt at the Cascades. Lay him up a month. Doing well. Hurt pretty bad, not dangerous. Nothing more to say. Nothing more to it.” Hamilton Tucker secured another button of his coat. Nat Rapps took a seat near by him.

“If fairly treated, Mr. Tucker,” said the reporter, “the *Investigator* avoids sensational work. Competent authority refuses information. We must look elsewhere. General information is always sensational. Not our fault; we do the best we can. Prominent man and his party stopping in——City. Prominent man seriously injured by unusual accident. A full account must go to the *Investigator* within three hours. I will interview the people about the hotel, consult the register and infer the rest.”

Hamilton Tucker drew a deep breath, glanced at the opened register lying upon the counter, and loosened two of the four buttons of his coat.

At the same time he turned partly toward Nat Rapps and said:

“Unusual accident! Yes, Mr.—er—”

“Rapps, of the *Investigator*,” prompted the reporter.

“Unusual accident, Mr. Rapps,” resumed Hamilton Tucker, now in a perspiration, and unfastening the remaining buttons of his coat. Again repeating the words, he added: “Full account of accident. That is what you want. Nothing else? No business matters? He is up here on business—at the mines.”

“His business affairs have no interest to the *Investigator*, Mr. Tucker. Go on with your account of the accident.”

“And you want nothing else?” asked Hamilton Tucker, suddenly becoming animated.

“Nothing else. Go on.”

“But her mother came with you! She is up stairs now.”

“On the same train. First news indicated that all of the party were killed or terribly injured. Of course, her mother would naturally come.”

"But she did not know that Se—that she was out of the city. How did she find that out?" Hamilton Tucker meditated and then, with an air of satisfaction, added: "It is all right, though. She has been with my wife all the time since we left the city.

Nat Rapps made no response to this, but again said:

"Go on with your account of the accident."

"I tell you, it was the fault of that drunken driver." Hamilton Tucker hesitated and looked out through the window, upward toward the mountain, although dense darkness was about it. As if gathering thought from the gloom outside, he continued silent until prompted by the reporter, upon which he turned from the window and, unbuttoning his waistcoat, resumed his narrative.

"That tire was all correct. The driver had four empty whisky flasks in that box under his seat. Anyway, I found the necks of four with the corks sticking in them, just where the box struck a rock under that big pine tree. That



box was smashed to flinders, and so were the flasks, except the necks, and I know they were empty when they struck the rock, because there was no smell of whisky on the splinters of the box nor on the rock. He had five or six doses of that lightning at the range house besides. I tell you, it was the fault of that boozy driver. The tire was all correct." Hamilton Tucker's narrative was here interrupted by generous profanity.

"The brute should have been killed," he continued with emphasis, "but he wasn't—wasn't even hurt, except just scratched a little. He lodged in that pine tree, way up on a high limb, the other side from where Mr. Chalmer Grose went down. The horses and wagon went down on the side facing the cliff. The driver was shouting for help all the time while I was climbing the rocks up them Cascades to get to the trouble. When I got there I shouted to him, 'Fly down!' I couldn't help him.

"I tell you, it was his fault. The tire was all correct. When we started from the range house

everything was all correct, except him—horses all right—they had been down that cliff road a thousand times—and if he had kept them to the track and not struck any of the outside rocks, Mr. Chalmer Grose wouldn't be laying up stairs with three ribs mashed in, and his left arm broken in two places, and otherwise scratched and bruised, and the hotel wouldn't have one dead horse and another one worse than dead (never can sell him for anything if he does get cured up), and you wouldn't be here."

Hamilton Tucker again meditated until prompted by the reporter.

"When the horses started to go over the cliff, you wouldn't have given six bits for the whole outfit, lives and all; yet there is no war so fierce but that some soldiers will escape."

This epigram was evidently a surprise to Hamilton Tucker himself, for he immediately made an attempt at repetition, but in this his diction conveyed a different meaning. The satisfaction of having expressed an idea somewhat outside of the commonplace seemed to govern

the remaining portion of his narrative, and to direct it into a dramatic channel.

“I tell you,” he said again, “it was his fault. We started from the range house in great shape. The blacks flew over the range and the oaks seemed to glide by us. When we struck into the high cut above the Cascades I told him to slack up; but Mr. Chalmer Grose said, ‘Set the brakes and go on.’ That was all right if the driver had been all right. We had got about half way down—where the tops of them big pines touch the cut—and the horses were on a stiff trot. Suddenly something crashed. I knew by the way the wagon lurched that a wheel was smashed, and that an end of the forward axle was on the ground. Well, that end on the ground must have struck against a rock, for it swung the horses around, and before I could tell you the forequarters of the near one were over the cliff and the rest of him and the other horse followed. Mr. Chalmer Grose was on the near side, sitting with me on the hind seat, and the driver was on the end of the front seat, corres-

ponding with my position. When the axle dropped, the driver shot out over the near side of the wagon and never touched the cliff, but plunged down into one of them pine trees and lodged there. He was drunk—the tire was all correct.

“Circumstances make a difference in how quick a man thinks, and I thought if I was shooting the other way, instead of the driver’s way, I would drop in the road instead of in the pines. I can never tell you how I got there, for it was all the way uphill, over the side of the wagon and over the hind wheel; and that wheel must have been whirling around in the air, because when I first got onto it my head was toward the road. It whirled around at least once, because a second afterward my head was over the wagon box, toward the Cascades, and I just got a glimpse of Mr. Chalmer Grose going the same way the driver did, into them pines. I must have backed off from that wheel, because the next thing I knew I was lying face down across the outside of the road, with my head

and one arm over the cliff. Mr.—*Investigator*, I had to lie there. I couldn't get up. I was paralyzed. Mr. Chalmer Grose was rolling over and over down the outside branches of one of them pines. All at once he dropped through, out of sight. It made me sick. I knew what was down there. It is full fifty feet from the lower limbs of them pines to the ground, and from there down to the Cascade so steep that a grizzly couldn't climb up."

Hamilton Tucker reflected a moment, looking out through the window toward the mountain, and then continued:

"But for a sight—if you wasn't interested—that team and the wagon, going down through the pines, following along after Mr. Chalmer Grose and breaking the limbs as they went, would stay with you longer and come back nights afterward.

"They didn't go so fast, and you could gather in the incidents. I couldn't see the horses, first sight; the wagon was on top, but the outfit took a roll inward, toward the body of the tree, and

the horses were all mixed up in the box of the wagon. The pole was broken off and splinters from the seats and branches from the pine flew in all directions. All at once they struck a big limb that didn't break. The wagon went down one side of it and one horse down the other side. The harness was a new one and it cracked like somebody was pumping on a Remington, when they pulled apart. Mr. *Investigator*, I've known ever since I began to herd sheep and rode a bronco in Calaveras, that horses were more near relation to human folks than most people suppose."

Giving this thought ample time to penetrate the mind of Nat Rapps, he continued: "Well, sir, that other horse slid down the limb to the tree, and when he stopped his forelegs were over the limb and his body was hanging on the other side. I'm a Greaser if that horse didn't put his hind legs around that tree and try to climb up and sit on the limb. For a horse to climb a tree ain't instinctive, as you would call it, and of course that horse reasoned that to get on the

limb was his only salvation. But he couldn't do it. He tried hard enough, and when he gave up he screamed—yes, sir, screamed—because he knew what was coming if he let go his hold.

“He had to let go. He went crashing down through the pine tree and I heard him strike below, soft like—not as I expected—and scramble up, and then fall and roll over the rocks down to the Cascades. I heard him splashing and scrambling to get up, and then he screamed again. He isn't the one that was killed. When I came to myself, I got up and ran down the road to the foot of the Cascades, near the little lake. I had to. I couldn't get down that cliff any place, to get to where Mr. Chalmer Grose was, and I expected he was killed.

“When I got to level ground and was turning to go up the gorge, along side of the Cascades, I stopped. I had to. My feet felt as if they were fastened in one of them soft asphaltum sidewalks. I couldn't lift them. That horse was just coming out of the gorge, hobbling. Mr. *Investigator*, you go out to the stable and look at

that horse. You can infer the rest. I can never tell you how he looked; but when he saw me he screamed, screamed three times, and then came toward me. I couldn't stir, and I expect he thought that I was standing there dead, for he turned away and went around the lake, among them painted rocks, toward the city, with that pine branch hanging over his back—the stableman will tell you about it; but you can never write up that scream. It filled the canyon, and I heard it echo from away down to the Pass.

“As soon as the ground let go of my feet I hurried up to where Mr. Chalmer Grose was, and he wasn't dead—only three ribs broken and his left arm in two places. That is what the doctors said when they got there. We got him down to the hotel. He is not dangerously hurt, and he is comfortable. That is all you need to say about him. You have got a good account of the accident; and he is a man who don't want much said about his affairs. News is all you want.”



"Is the driver still in the tree?" inquired Nat Rapps.

"I forgot about him. When the folks got there from the city, he kept up a steady stream of yelling until they got a rope to him from above. He tied it around himself and was pulled up onto the cliff road. Don't forget to say that he was drunk. The tire was all correct. He has been saying to-day that the tire was brittle as glass, and broke in six pieces when he struck the rock road around the cliff. But we were half way down when the trouble began, and he must have run against a boulder on the side of the track. The tire was all correct."

An hour later, Nathan Rapps wired a full account of this accident to the *Investigator*, and no mention of Seraltha Ames was made in that dispatch, nor was there any intimation in it that the purposes of Chalmer Grose, during his visit to the mountain city, included other than those of business.

While Hamilton Tucker was giving his version of the accident to Nat Rapps, another nar-

rative unfolded its surprises in the chamber where Seraltha had mourned the expected death of Chalmer Grose.

An hour before the return of the relief party, a messenger had arrived from the Cascades, bearing details of the accident. A knock on the door of Seraltha's chamber brought before the messenger a girl who shrank away from the gas-light that poured into her darkened room from the hall-way, and who held a kerchief against her eyes as he began to deliver the message. A woman stood before him in the full light of the hall-way, with strange violet flashes streaming through swollen eyelids, and calmly asking him to repeat his message. She went with him to the office of the hotel, and sought confirmation of his tidings. This given, she directed that the bed be transferred from the chamber assigned to Chalmer Grose to the parlor of his suite. She then went to the porch of the hotel, to remain there until the arrival of the relief party with the helpless man, to

whom she had already determined that she would give comfort and care.

Men who were in the office turned the pages of the register, and, whispering together, strolled out upon the porch to gaze at the woman who watched and waited there. She gave them no heed. The cold night wind that dropped from the mountain and swept down through the city threw loosened strands of brown hair across her face and about her shoulders. The calm face looked wistfully upward in the direction of the mountain, or along the street toward its junction with the canyon road, peering intently through the darkness.

The return of the relief party had brought her joy, sympathy, and the delusive pretender to kinship with love, pity. She put aside her maiden reserve when she saw her wounded admirer prostrate on the mattress in the long mountain wagon, which halted at the entrance of the hotel at midnight of the day of the accident. She cautioned those who gently lifted

him from the wagon, and directed them to the spacious parlor.

When Chalmer Grose was laid upon the bed the vigils of Seraltha Ames began. She remained by his side or within call during the remainder of the night and the following day, until the arrival of her mother. This being announced to her, she went to the hallway, and, taking the hand of her mother, led her into her chamber. Silently the mother sank into a wicker chair, her hat and wraps unremoved; silently the daughter sat opposite her in raiment unaccustomed to the mother's eyes.

When the heart misinterprets another's meaning, loving sentences clear away perplexities; but when souls are at variance no words can bring understanding. The mother, dressed in the homely street garb of labor, knew only the pleasures from scenes upon the streets, in shops and in the parks. The drudgery of home work had blunted her desires and the cooking-range had shriveled her aspirations. In glaring contrast was her daughter, seated upon a rock-

ing chair in graceful attire. Education had poured the light of thought over her soul, revealing to her the vast possibilities of an expanding life. Between these two souls no dialogue could establish a unity of perceptions. As if both in their differing ways comprehended this truth, Seraltha related the events and movements of the past few weeks to her mother, who kept silence until the conclusion.

"Is it a dream?" Mrs. Ames then asked.

She put her worn hand outward, groping as if to feel her pillow after an awakening in the darkness of her chamber, and downward along her side, where the bed might be were she lying upon it.

This question bore within it a measure of distance, untraversable between the understanding of the mother and the conduct of the daughter. As if in a dream, Mrs. Ames then went with her daughter to the dining room, and immediately after dinner to the chamber assigned to her use. Seraltha resumed her place at the bedside of Chalmer Grose, watching, without

sleep, through the second night of his illness. In this semblance of a dream Mrs. Ames struggled with the incomprehensible, until the rising sun shone into her chamber. She went to the morning train for a return to her home, with the pressure of a daughter's kiss upon her lips and a daughter's farewell words in her ear, accompanied with brave sentences that bore in their decision the logic of self-sacrifice.

"He needs me. I will stay by him."

Nat Rapps, having completed his duties in the interest of the *Investigator*, departed on the same train.

After receiving full instructions from Chalmer Grose relating to his duties upon a return to San Francisco, Hamilton Tucker took the evening train for that city in company with his wife. From the time in which Hermina had received information of the accident at the Cascades to that in which she departed from the hotel, she had not shown the slightest interest in the results. She had not spoken to Seraltha, nor had she made inquiries regarding the condition

of Chalmer Grose. She knew nothing of their relations as nurse and patient, and her husband did not inform her. She had finished the reading of the interesting book and returned it to its place on the parlor table. A traveler, who afterward occupied the suite of rooms in which the table stood, found in the book a passage heavily underscored, which read:

*"We decline, we descend, we fall; we are even overthrown and we hardly perceive it. This always ends, it is true, by an awakening, but a tardy one. In the meantime it seems as though we were neutral in the game which is being played between our good and our ill fortune. We are the stakes."*



## CHAPTER XI.

**T**HE second floor of the hotel in which Chalmer Grose lay grievously wounded, had been arranged and furnished for the entertainment of patrons to whom prices for comfort and service were of slight concern. These patronized the hotel in goodly numbers; some, resident in the mountain city, made wealthy by the outpouring of the mines thereabout; others transient, from larger cities—especially San Francisco—who were intent upon the pursuit of profit or pleasure. Broad corridors and an ample court, in which a fountain played over semi-tropic water plants, amply separated each suite of rooms from the others. Sensuous decorations, yet well within the demands of decent art, embellished the walls and frescoes of the suite parlors.

In that occupied by Chalmer Grose, which overlooked the court by broad, screened win-



dows, a masterpiece in oil hung against the wall upon the right of the bed standing in the center of the room. The painting represented Night, exemplified by a woman draped in black lace that fell over her figure from broad bands of black looped upon white shoulders. She lifted an undraped arm into the dark space above her and touched a golden star. Between the chandeliers, depending from the ceiling near either end of the room, troops of maidens in enticing disarray fled before pursuing centaurs along an oblong, frescoed course in pretense of alarm.

Upon the bed beneath the centaurs and fleeing maidens Chalmer Grose had endured the torture of a surgeon's operation. An arm twice broken and three ribs fractured, yet chance was in a kindly mood when he dropped through the yielding foliage of the pine and shot downward fifty feet toward the Cascades. Huge boulders lay underneath the pines in close array, and his life was the penalty had he fallen upon one of them. He fell between two that held within

their enclosure a thick mat of pine burrs and decaying foliage.

Chance was also kind to the horse that bore the tidings of disaster to Seraltha, inscribed upon his glossy blackness. When his hold was loosened from the limb of the tree, his struggles threw him outward. The yielding branches aided him to drop upon the mat of burrs and foliage, where Chalmer Grose lay stunned, but not fatally injured. It was the head of the horse that, as he fell upon the mat between the rocks, struck Chalmer Grose, breaking his arm and his ribs.

Beside this bed Seraltha began her vigil immediately after the surgeon had performed his operation. She was in constant attendance during the succeeding day and night, except during the short interval when she was called to see her mother. For the convenience of the surgeon's attendant, who remained in the hotel subject to call, Chalmer Grose rested upon the left side of the broad bed. His injuries were upon his left side. Inflammation from the injured ribs af-

fecting the action of his heart. Frequently, during the first thirty-six hours, the attendant was called to apply lotions or to otherwise arrange for his comfort. Becomingly, Seraltha had retired from the room during these services, but immediately returned when they had been completed.

The disturbed circulation of his blood drove a persistent pain through the brain of Chalmer Grose. He rejected the cooling applications of the attendant to his forehead, but accepted the soft, caressing hand of Seraltha in their place, or the soothing puffs of mountain air gently wafted across his face from her fan. This devotion brought ease to his pains, and in the afternoon of the second day he fell asleep. Seraltha watched over him and plied the cooling fan until his awakening, which did not occur until after sunset.

When Chalmer Grose awoke the attendant performed his duties while Seraltha was at dinner. When she returned to the bedside he had retired. The gas-lights beyond the bed

were turned low, and a shadow, as of twilight, spread over the bed from the high panels at its head. Informing her that the pain had returned, Chalmer Grose expressed a wish that she might dispel it as before.

Again Seraltha sat near him; again her soothing hand and cooling fan performed their services. A light evening breeze came through the screened windows from the court, bearing the sound of the fountain pattering on the broad leaves of the semi-tropic water plants. All else was still.

"If I sleep again," he said, "you can summon the attendant and retire to your chamber."

"If you sleep, I will do so," she responded.

Her hand continued in its movements on his forehead, the fan kept up its gentle waving, and the water jets splashed upon the broad leaves at the fountain. Five minutes passed.

"A slight breeze comes through the windows of the court," he then said.

"It is refreshing," she added.

She withdrew her hand from his forehead and

pressed the fingers against her eyelids. He turned his face suddenly toward her. The movement caused a pain in the broken arm, and a frown came upon his face. Instantly she returned her hand to its duties.

“Forgive me,” she said, “it will not leave your forehead again until you sleep.”

He breathed heavily as the pain coursed along his arm. Seraltha drew closer to him and her hand stroked his forehead more caressingly. When the pain had abated, he said:

“If the breeze could blow full upon me”—He hesitated, as if in thought upon the possible advantages contained in this fancy, or in expectation that she would devise a method for its realization.

“My position keeps it from you,” she said; and, arising from her chair, she self-reproachfully added: “How unthoughtful I have been!”

The breeze came upon his face, but not sooner than the hand of his uninjured right arm was raised from the counterpane to clasp his forehead where Seraltha had stroked it.

“I want the breeze,” he said; “it revives me. But I cannot—I cannot spare your hand until I sleep.”

He said this pleadingly and with groans. Seraltha hurriedly drew her chair around the bed, and, placing it close by the other side, sat upon it and extended her hand toward his head.

“I cannot touch your head from this side,” she said, making an effort to do so. “The bed is very broad.”

“Recline upon it,” he suggested. “I do not need the fan—the breeze is strong—only your hand upon my forehead. I *must* have that. Only a little while and I will be asleep. You can then leave me and go to your chamber.”

He extended his right hand toward her. It touched her arm, which rested upon the bed, measuring the vacant interval from her position to his head. He grasped it and held it firmly. It came slowly toward him, and again her hand stroked his forehead. She pushed an unused pillow upward against the head-board and rested

her shoulder upon it, her head upon her open left hand.

The clock in the dome of the City Hall struck nine. Its mellow tones died away toward the mountain, and no sound came into the parlor, except the pattering of water in the court fountain. The soft hand gently stroked his forehead, and the face below it smiled; not a smile of love, for the eyes were turned from her; not of gratitude, for the thin lips, tightly closed, withheld speech; not of relief from pain, for his heated blood had cooled while he slept, but a smile of triumph—such as might be on the face of Satan at fallen innocence. He smiled; this was all that she saw; and the soft hand pressed closer upon his forehead in gratitude.

The smile deepened among the lines of his face. The soft hand still stroked his forehead, yet more slowly than at first. Slowly it moved in devious ways, as if by its own volition. He turned his eyes stealthily toward her. Her hand moved downward and stroked his cheek, slowly and aimlessly. It stopped and rested

there. He saw her eyes close. Her head slipped from the tired hand and fell near to his. He felt her warm breath on his face! The clock in the dome struck ten.





## CHAPTER XII.

**W**HEN Hamilton Tucker returned to San Francisco from the scene of his recent adventures, he bore authority from Chalmer Grose that multiplied his duties. The private interests of his employer were now in his care.

The grain ranch of Chalmer Grose received first attention. He went there on the second day after his arrival at home, in company with the foreman of the barn on Pine street. Carpenters began work on an addition to the ranch stable the next morning, with the foreman as director. Hamilton Tucker returned to the city and spent the remainder of the day, after his arrival there, in a minute survey of interiors of various structures on business streets, conversing in the meantime, with occupants and janitors.

This he continued through the following day. Finding offices and store-rooms untenanted, he

caused placards to be attached to the doors of vacant premises, which read:

*“ For Rent.  
Apply to  
Hamilton Tucker.  
No. 12 Hotel Havencourt Block.”*

At nine in the morning of the following day, Hamilton Tucker sat before his desk, writing a letter of several pages. Seated at another desk, his wife, Hermina, wrote dates and head lines in new account books, then prepared a typewriter for service, in the operation of which she seemed familiar.

Having completed his writing, he turned toward his wife and, with the letter held out before him, exclaimed:

“ Business!”

Although in speaking this word he had employed a louder tone than that usual in his conversation, Hermina, whose face was turned partially away from him, continued with her practice on the typewriter.

“ Business, I say!” He spoke louder than

before, and she quietly turned, looking at him without response, except the inquiry conveyed by her eyes.

“When I say ‘Business’ in this office or anywhere else that we are together on business, as if that word was somebody’s name, I’ll always mean you.”

Hermína made no response. He reflected awhile, still holding the letter in his hand, and then continued:

“A business man don’t want everybody to know that his wife is typewriting and book-keeping, so I can’t say ‘Mrs. Tucker.’ I can’t say ‘Hermína,’ or ‘Mína,’ or names of that sort—men might think you wasn’t particular with your employer. Men are fools, and you are good-looking. It wouldn’t be your fault. You don’t want any more trouble. You have had one, and you ain’t looking for any more. But they might, and then there would be trouble right here in this office. So, when I want you, I’ll say ‘Business!’ about like that.”

Hamilton Tucker raised one foot upward and

placed it on his desk, at the same time tilting his chair far backward. Hermina still looked at him inquiringly.

“Yes, there is something more,” he continued. “You didn’t act right up there in the mountains, somehow. You and the girl got at outs. You must have said something to her that lacked judgment. Now, I’ll tell you, I have got a good job here, tending to them buildings and that ranch, and if you disturb it with any of your nonsense there is going to be trouble. Mr. Chalmer Grose knows that you are coming in here to keep the books and do typewriting, and he didn’t say a word against a hundred a month for you. You ought to have some sense. It was all arranged before we started for the mountains, and our first month’s salary was paid to me. You knew what some of it was for. I married you because I thought you had good sense. He thinks that you have—said so the last talk I had with him—said you proved it by keeping away from him after he was hurt and giving the girl a clear field to take care of him. I may own a

grain ranch if you don't give him a reason to think otherwise. Typewrite this letter."

She obeyed, and gave her work to him in a complete form, which he enclosed and sealed in an envelope. What Hamilton Tucker saw in her pale face, as she gave the copy to him, he believed to be fear. After giving her instructions relating to the mission of possible callers during his absence, he passed out of the office, contented to think that she was safely within his control.

After posting the letter, he called a cab and was driven to the barn on Pine street. Dismissing the cabman, he then superintended the transfer of the horses, except three, to the railway station for shipment to the grain ranch. The carriages were drawn by the three reserved horses to a down-town livery stable, situated a short walking distance from the Hotel Haven-court. A telephone message at the barn brought an auctioneer's van that carried away bedding and furniture. At noon the barn was deserted,

the double doors of the carriage-room gaping open as if inviting sympathy of passers-by to the loneliness within.

Prosperity favored the business affairs of No. 12 Hotel Havencourt Block. Within ten days Hamilton Tucker had secured tenants for all store-rooms and offices heretofore vacant in the houses over which Chalmer Grose had granted him supervision, except one. Upon this one no "For Rent" placard had been placed. This was upon Market street.

This thoroughfare pushes its broad surface through the city of San Francisco from the ferries on the bay to the southwestern limit. Below this street, to the eastward, all other streets are laid squarely with it, but not in conformity with the four cardinal points of the compass. Beyond its western line proprieties of direction are observed by all the streets, that portion of the city seeming to have been pushed southward and wrinkled into hills. Market street is not intersected by any other. It intercepts. It devours. It builds again from itself,

upon the east in right angles, upon the west in acute. It names and numbers from itself, and gives no heed to continuity of passage across and beyond, but ends a street, perhaps, against the middle of an opposite block or within a few doors of its limit, seemingly as chance might have directed.

In one of these acute angles upon the westerly side of Market street Chalmer Grose had erected a building of four stories and basement, which was, at the time of Hamilton Tucker's advent as agent, partially occupied above the ground floor for office purposes and the remaining space for those of a lodging house. Retail shops of various sorts filled the ground floor of either street, except the space within the apex of the angle, which extended back from the point some thirty feet. This space was protected from intrusion by a rough board screen, which, resting upon the sidewalk, allowed sufficient space for a passage between itself and the building. A door secured by a heavy hasp and padlock gave entrance through the screen. Plate-

glass doors opened into a room occupying this space. This was the room upon which no "For Rent" placard had been placed. Hamilton Tucker made many figures during spare moments, based upon a rental valuation of this room, found upon a plan of the entire building, which he kept in the cabinet of his desk.

That this room was of special interest to him, became evident from his frequent visits to it. The first visit he made during the evening of the fourth day after taking possession of the office, 12 Hotel Havencourt Block. Unfastening the padlock, he passed inside the screen and along the passage to one of the plate-glass doors. Entering the room, he drew a candle from his pocket and lighted it. Masses of sparkling reflections answered the dim light of the candle from gorgeous chandeliers, and from a deep wainscoting of Mexican onyx about the room. A nickel-plated balustrade guarded a stairway to a basement of the same dimensions as the room above, and of similar appearance. After a full survey of the premises he blew out the



light and went upon the street. The time was nine o'clock. The moon shone full from a sky unblemished by a cloud.

San Francisco has but one boulevard—that of the Park, used only by day; but one promenade, used by shoppers and strangers from morning until nightfall, and by everybody thereafter far into the night—the western side of Market and Kearny streets.

The ocean winds that blow over the city by day, sending a chill through furs and fluttering skirts, change to gentle breezes, that soothe with satin touch, as the sun sinks into the western waters.

The world is on this promenade from dusk till midnight. The Californian woman unveils her superb complexion in defiance of a thousand electric lights in shop and street. They of the East walk here, in search of health. Envy spreads over their faces in ghastly white as the native passes by them. The woman who drives by day upon the boulevard walks here in the

evening, bringing with her sons and daughters, friends and husband.

Hamilton Tucker did not walk among the people. He stood upon the edge of the sidewalk opposite to the vacant room, and counted those who passed by it. He then went two blocks toward the ferries and noticed those who passed before an occupied room of similar shape and position at the junction of the streets. Fewer people passed the vacant room than the occupied one, two blocks below. Many people turned into the side streets from the lower blocks. The vacant room was just above the more desirable localities for trade, and the shops in its vicinity were of a class lower than those below. But the city was growing rapidly toward the southwest. He crossed the street and entered the occupied room. It was a gorgeously-furnished saloon. He there conversed with a barkeeper.

After several visits to the vacant room, Hamilton Tucker entered it one evening in company with two men, one wearing a high-crowned hat

and a light overcoat, with velvet lapels thrown far back and extending below the waist. The other man wore a slouch hat and was stoop-shouldered. During the evening the man of the slouch hat considered the speech and figures made by the others—especially Hamilton Tucker—with suspicion. Later on, he gave evidence of interest, and upon leaving the room, at twelve o'clock, the conduct of each one showed a unity of thought and purpose with the others. They went upon the street and walked to the Hotel Havencourt bar, where they called for and were served with the liquors of their choice.

Hamilton Tucker then raised his glass and turned his face toward his companions, who raised their glasses and turned their faces toward him.

"Gentlemen," said Hamilton Tucker, impressively, "it's a proud day." He hesitated. The man who wore a slouch hat lowered his glass to the edge of the bar and looked down into it. Hamilton Tucker saw this movement, and turning to face the man fully, he

said: "It's a late day, I know; but it's a proud day." Touching the glass that rested upon the edge of the bar with his own, which he then raised to a level with his hat, he added: "Here's to the Calaveras! May she win us all a grain ranch."

"May she win three thousand in six hours," responded the man in the slouch hat, still holding his glass upon the edge of the bar.

Hamilton Tucker involuntarily looked through the open door of the corridor leading to the cinch room.

"May she pay expenses the first year," said the man of the tall hat and velvet lapels.

"Huh!" exclaimed Hamilton Tucker.

"Sense!" responded the man of the slouch hat.

"Sure!" said the man of the velvet lapels.

The glasses were raised, the contents drunk. The party filed out at the door in the same order observed upon entering.

"The Three' from Calaveras!" exclaimed an old patron of the bar, who came in by the way

of an interior door at the instant that the party was filing out.

“What is that?” queried the barkeeper, as the patron approached the bar.

“Before you came,” answered the patron. “I’ll tell you some other time; too late now. Give me a reposer and I’ll go to bed.”

In the evening, just two weeks from the date of the above dialogues, much music from brass instruments poured out from the room heretofore vacant in the acute angles of Market and ——— streets. Ornamented signs above the plate-glass doors of either street blazoned the words, “The Calaveras.” Within, a bar of curly redwood spread its polished length across the wider end of the room, blending its tints with the Mexican onyx wainscoting and fronting an elaborate sideboard, surmounted by two plate-glass mirrors joined in a gilded frame that touched the frescoes above and the walls upon either side. A collection of meats, sauces and preserves, of fowls, salads and shell-fish covered an ample table placed in the center of the room.

Men who entered singly, in pairs and in groups, partook of things to eat and things to drink, and spoke words of encouragement, between sips and mouthfuls, to a man who stood at one end of the bar giving much attention to the movements of three barkeepers in service; he wore a tall hat and a light overcoat with velvet lapels.

Four rooms had been constructed in the basement—two upon either side of a narrow hallway, ventilated by double windows opening into the sidewalk areas. Soft carpets covered the floors and a lounge invited to repose in each one of the four rooms, and in each stood a heavy round table covered with a green cloth, upon which rested a call bell. Easy chairs were placed about these. Perforations about two inches in length and one-fourth of an inch in width and adorned with an oblong silver or nickel plate showed through the green cloth cover in the exact centre of the tables.

Although possessing an equal interest with Monroe Chase in "The Calaveras," neither Hamilton Tucker nor Chance Neely was present

at its opening, nor were they seen thereabout. Upon the books of wholesale liquor dealers the words, "open account" appeared opposite the firm name, "Monroe Chase & Co."

Hamilton Tucker continued in business at No. 12 Hotel Havencourt Block, while Chance Neely pursued the mysterious sinner at his desk in the rooms of the private detective agency. However, during evening hours, both frequented "The Calaveras," bringing with them friends and acquaintances, who drank much over the redwood bar, and played cards at the perforated tables in the basement rooms.



## CHAPTER XIII.

**A**BOUT twelve o'clock of the night, in which the opening of "The Calaveras" was celebrated with music and feasting, a man wearing a heavy sack coat, loosely fitting his waist and shoulders, but tightly buttoned at his neck; brown jean overalls over checkered trousers upturned around the legs of well-fitting boots with round toes and very high heels, and a broad hat, dingy white, of stiff rim and conical crown, walked about the three apartments of the hut in the artificial glen.

A knitted scarf of intermingling colors covered his lower face in triple folds, and, crossing under his chin, extended upward into the crown of his hat, covering his ears and side face. He made a selection from clothing which hung from the canvas lining of the second apartment, and, taking the articles into the first one, he put them upon blankets that lay half opened on



the floor. He then went into the third apartment, and, setting on the rock floor a tin candlestick which held half of a sputtering candle, with his fingers he dug pebbles and fragments of stone from a fissure in the floor. He afterward picked coins from the depth of the fissure, carefully counted them twice, and, wrapping them in a cloth, he returned to the first apartment. Raising the lid of the coffin-shaped box, he began a search within it. He obtained what he sought, and replaced the lid and sat upon it. He held the object close to the light and looked steadily at it.

The palm upon which the object rested, his wrists and the backs of his hands, and the narrow strip of face revealed between his hat and scarf, suggested in color a mingling of copper and gold. His hair, concealed in front and upon either side by hat and scarf, was short, coarse and glossy black, and extended far down upon his sinewy neck.

His attitude at first seemed reposeful, as of one in deliberate examination and deeply inter-

ested. He soon began to turn the object about. His eyes now shone with a deeper brown. He interlaced his fingers, clasping the object within his palms, and, lifting his hands above his head, he sprang from his seat and walked rapidly to and fro over the stone floor of the first apartment, then into the second and around and about it. Vowel sounds, suggesting the Spanish language, were constantly forced through his scarf as he walked; no labial sounds mingled with them. Thrice he walked in the darkness around the second apartment, and, returning to the first one, he unclasped his hands as he approached the coffin-shaped box. After stamping violently upon the rock floor he sat again upon the box and held the object upon the palm of his hand in the light of the candle.

This object was of lead, its surface corroded by age. It was rounded to half its length, the other half being shattered, flattened and indented. It had once been a bullet of a Winchester rifle.

Eleven years had passed since this bullet

had served a sinister purpose. A lever clicked it into the cartridge-chamber, and a flash behind it burned murder into the soul of this man. He stood in the doorway of a hut made of logs and adobe and thickly roofed with branches of mountain fir. The hut rested upon a bed of loose rock that had been excavated with pick and lever from the face of a steep declivity in the mountains of Western Nevada. The rock was dark and mottled. It sparkled in the sunlight as if from tiny drops of dew upon the points of its scabrous surface. While searching the wilderness about him the man in the doorway had found it and then built a hut upon it. It was the outcrop of a silver mine. He had staked out the boundaries of his claim and had posted a notice of discovery and ownership. The notice was in Spanish, and the name underneath was Juan Bermuda.

Yet Juan Bermuda was not a Spaniard; tints of metallic colors showed upon his face and in his eyes, that of copper prevailing, although he was not an Indian. The proud Castilian and

the complaisant Indian created another race, anomalous and distinct. Juan Bermuda was a Mexican.

Contentedly he looked out from the door of his hut at sunset upon his discovery, upon the stakes along the declivity and upon the notice. As he stood there the bullet sped toward him, aimed from a clump of chaparral growing upon the elevation to his right. He reeled backward and fell to the floor of his hut, blood pouring from his mouth in jets. From the hurt upon his face the slug had passed on. It penetrated the log door casing, and, turned aside by the adobe in the wall, it dropped to the floor beside him, together with fragments of the wall.

In his agony he grasped about himself, crushing the fragments of adobe within his hands. Something resisted, cutting the fingers and palm of his right hand. Forgetful of the wound in his face, he sprang to his feet to examine the battered bullet that had caused another pain. He staggered to the doorway, and, stepping outside, turned the missile over and over again with

his uninjured hand in the bright light of the open air. Another bullet whizzing by his ear threw splinters of wood and a shower of adobe from the wall of the hut to the ground before him. The report that followed from the rifle in the clump of chaparral, caused him to look in that direction. He saw a light puff of smoke, whitened by the shadows of approaching twilight. Still another bullet hissed by him, this time nearer. Other splinters and a shower of adobe pattered upon the ground before him, and then another report came from the clump of chaparral. Juan Bermuda sprang over the low parapet of mottled rocks raised upon the declivity to secure the foundation of his hut and, with the battered bullet in his hand, ran swiftly to the denser shrubbery and pines growing below, other messengers from the Winchester rifle hissing above and around him.

He who aimed the rifle did not follow, yet Juan Bermuda ran through gorges, over mountain spurs and across a plain, until midnight. He ran along the way by which he came into

the mountains, and halted beside a stream that hurried from the plain through a steep and narrow gorge in falls and swirls and foaming cascades. He threw himself down beside the stream, near the verge of the uppermost fall, and bathed his hands, his neck, and the wound in his face. Bending far over the stream, he put his face into it to drink. No water responding to the draught of his lips, he sank his face deeper into the stream. His throat refused its functions; he could not swallow.

He sprang to his feet, and, clasping his wounded hand over his mouth and the other about his throat, he looked upward into the sky, to the bright full moon directly over him, floated low by the clear mountain air. He reeled, as he had done on the floor of his hut, with his face still upturned toward the sky. A discolored patch upon the glistening water where his face had touched moved slowly toward the verge of the gorge.

A death that clutches the throat and chokes with thirst is a demon torture. Smothered in

that which it denies, death comes welcomed. Juan Bermuda reeled to the edge of the shining stream, and, throwing himself into the midst of the dark patch upon its surface, he sank with it over the verge of the waterfall.

Stifled screams from below arose above the noise of splashing water, and harsh, guttural imprecations, crept downward along the gorge. The fall was slight, yet rounded and slippery boulders lay in the shallow stream, and upon these he had fallen and been rolled among them by the rushing water far down to a merciful, quiet pool. From this he drew himself upon the rocks along its edge, angry, bruised and sore.

Resting awhile he picked his way along the gorge. He passed by a placid lake, enclosed by terraced pines and among weird painted rocks, to a grass expanse, at the farther side of which stood low buildings of adobe, log and cornstalk walls, and grass or tule roofs covered with dew that sparkled in the sun.

This was a small Mexican settlement on the

borders of a new mountain town. He rapped upon a door and was admitted. It was a year thereafter when he first emerged from it with his lower face wrapped in a knitted scarf of triple folds, the ends crossing under his chin and secured beneath the crown of his hat. Hot fevers had dried his blood, and his hands were thin and claw-like. Fierce chills had shaken and withered his muscles. The bullet from the Winchester rifle had entered his face at the right corner of his mouth, and, shattering his teeth in its course, had emerged at the left corner, passing into the log door-casing. Flying fragments of teeth had cut his lips to shreds, and cruel gangrene had left a cavity, through which he had become enabled to eat and drink, and in which a dampened sponge rested when he was not thus engaged. He had no money, and proper surgery was impossible. Nature and his Mexican friends did their best for him, and patching the evidence of their incompetency with sponge and scarf, he stepped into the world again. He could not converse, except in writing.



## CHAPTER XIV.

**W**HEN able to withstand the fatigue Juan Bermuda started upon a journey to his mine in company with a Mexican friend, who had treated him kindly. He had made no mention of his mine during his illness, fearing treachery. This, or revenge, is what the Mexican looks for behind rock and chaparral, in market, fandango and chamber.

A wagon road wound through the expanse of green over which he had walked a year before. A wagon road led through the tinted rocks, over which he had painfully clambered, and around the pine-encircled lake. He stood gazing upward in astonishment as he traced its sharp grade above the cataracts where he had battled with stream and boulder. He walked slowly and thoughtfully as he crossed the plain above, then sat by the road among the spurs in deep meditation; he had found a piece of mottled

rock that sparkled as with dew upon the points of its surface.

A wagon road led him to the mine, but his hut was not there, nor its foundation, nor his claim stakes, nor the notice, nor the bunch of chaparral from which puffs of white smoke arose in the twilight a year before. But an engine was there, puffing laboriously as it drew heavy loads of mottled rock out of a deep shaft that pierced the ground where his hut had stood, and men were there who laughed scornfully when he reproduced the notice on a scrap of paper, and wrote upon another demanding possession of his mine, signing his name, Juan Bermuda. They showed to him a printed form bearing official signatures that recognized the ownership, and gave possession of the mine to one Chalmer Grose, resident of the city of San Francisco, county of San Francisco, State of California, and a citizen of the United States of America.

Juan Bermuda copied the names and the imposing array of localities upon a slip of paper,

and he and his companion went away down the declivity where the bullets from the Winchester rifle had hissed about his head a year before, and where fragments of ore from his mine were now strewn over a road that led to smelters in the mountain city. At the foot of the declivity he stopped and looked upward toward the mine. Puffs of steam, fleecy white in the deepening twilight, arose in measured volumes from the engine that drew from his mine, yet labored for another. He took the battered bullet from his pocket, and held it toward the engine with the thumb and finger of his left hand. Lifting his right hand above his head, and with his eyes fixed upon the bullet, he forced harsh guttural sounds through the triple folds of the knitted scarf, that bore the tones of mingled prayer, threat and imprecation. Increasing the vehemence of the muffled sounds, he raised his left hand to a level with his right, and, looking upward into the darkening sky, turned round and round upon the road, stamping his feet and

grinding his heels against its flinty surface. His companion made the sign of the Cross.

Revenge is akin to insanity. It broods upon fixed ideas. Like the hallucination of mania, it creates a figure amidst unchanging scenery and rivets the creation upon the brain.

Juan Bermuda immediately returned to San Francisco whence he had come into the mountains two years before the discovery of the mine. Upon the day of his arrival there, he visited the office of a physician who was popular among the Mexican people of that city, in the vain hope that the severity of his affliction might be mitigated. In this office he met Lethe St. Pier, who was there in the interest of her calling as nurse, and who gave him kindly notice. When he went upon the street she followed him, and, taking his arm, she walked about with him to various shops and furnishing stores, where he selected clothing of Mexican style and colors, which he wore when they came again upon the street. As he could not converse intelligibly, and she could not read nor

write, their methods of communication were adjusted to these conditions.

On the following day he began to work in the glen, and within a week he had completed the hut, building after the manner of his people. Lethe St. Pier went there with him, and, remaining, she cared for him during ten years, until she took possession of the house on Pine street, notwithstanding the fact that she owned valuable property on a popular business street.

Whenever Juan Bermuda left the hut to go upon the streets he wore the scarf of triple folds. This was not often, and occurred usually between eight and twelve in the evening. Chalmer Grose was the legal owner of the mine that should be his; and to see Chalmer Grose, to know him when they met by night, to feel assured that he should know him in utter darkness, to know his habits, his coming and going during the night, covered all the purposes of Juan Bermuda when absent from the hut, except that he sometimes went upon journeys to the country, taking with him blankets and provi-

sions. These journeys extended over several days, and included visits to Mexican settlements not far distant from the city. Upon his return to the hut he brought many long black hairs from the manes and tails of horses, besides chile peppers and herbs.

Had he sought revenge by ordinary methods, a score of opportunities had been afforded him during these years for the use of pistol, club or knife on Chalmer Grose, under circumstances favorable to his escape; but revenge had traced a scene upon his brain for him to reproduce in action. He waited.

While he again sat upon the coffin-shaped box, looking upon the battered bullet, memories clustered about the scene that revenge had traced, and a smile lighted his eyes and showed in the moving folds of his scarf, as if that which he had sought was near at hand. Arising, he put the bullet into an inner pocket. He then rolled his blankets, together with that which he had laid upon them, and secured them in place with heavy thongs. Lifting an earthen

jug that stood upon the rock floor near the box, and holding the candle in one hand, he placed the mouth of the jug facing the pine wall of the room, and, walking slowly, poured a fluid from it. This he continued in the three apartments, encircling each one. He then placed the short candle diagonally within an interstice of the pine boards where oil from the jug had dripped downward. Throwing the candle-stick down he seized his bundle and hurried from the hut.

He stood an instant by the door in an attitude of listening, and, leaving it open, he walked rapidly out of the glen by the sand knoll and down the streets below, to the entrance of the church of the Mission Dolores. The time was one o'clock. Dropping his bundle upon the lawn fronting the church, he entered, made a genuflection and knelt on the floor.

He did not count his rosary—the time in which he knelt was not sufficient; besides, his hands were clasped toward the sanctuary. If

he did repeat "Ave Marias" to aid him in his design, the number might have been twenty.

As he arose, the clangor of gongs sounded faintly from distant streets. Nearer, these sounds mingled with the clatter of hoofs and wheels. Clouds of smoke from hissing fire-engines curled against the stained-glass windows of the church. The engines halted on the street outside, and Juan Bermuda stood motionless where he had knelt.

The quick firemen unrolled hose to the entrance of the glen. Water gushed out upon the blazing hut, and in a moment darkness filled the glen. Firemen gathered about the coffin, and by the dim light of a lantern they carefully lifted the charred lid away. The serpent that had hung in the apex of the second apartment now lay along the bed of the coffin, uncoiled.

"A witch lived here," said a man who peered over the wall of the glen, and who lived in a house upon the elevation above it. He had been awakened by the crackling flames. The



group of firemen looked upward, but saw nothing in the darkness; then each looked at the others. Separating, they hastily put their apparatus in order and went away.


Juan Bermuda still stood where he had knelt.

In the gray light of the dawning day, he looked out at the door and saw that his bundle was gone. He went upon the deserted streets, and after a careful survey of the smooth lawns that spread about the Mission Dolores, he walked hastily toward the center of the city. A half hour later he rapped gently upon the rear door of the house on Pine street.

Lethe St. Pier admitted him.



## CHAPTER XV.

N *Investigator* reporter, evidently a novice, interviewed the firemen after their return from the glen, and wrote a lurid column of flashing flames, of ghosts, sepulchers, serpents and a disembodied witch. He made mention of a bundle found near the Mission Dolores and brought to the engine house. The young reporter did not unroll the bundle.

As Nat Rapps sat at the breakfast table the following morning, the heading of the column, announcing unusual and mysterious happenings, drew his attention. A faint smile overspread his face as he glanced down the column, but it disappeared when he read the concluding paragraph. On his way down town he passed the engine house. He did not enter it, but went directly to the Central Police Station, where he made inquiries regarding a bundle found by the firemen on the previous night. An officer

brought it out, and, at the request of Nat Rapps, unrolled it.

Two coarse blankets held a sack coat; a pair of boots, very high-heeled; a long, loosely-knitted scarf of mingled colors and stained at regular intervals, and a soiled Mexican hat with a conical crown.

"Nothing remarkable; a wandering Greaser's outfit," said the officer, laconically, and he turned to other duties.

"Very remarkable," soliloquized Nat Rapps, who had found a lariat in a broad inside pocket of the coat. The lariat was very long—nearly fifty feet—closely plaited and of black horse-hair. The portion to which he gave most attention formed a noose, the loop being of uncommon thickness and sliding freely along the lariat until an obstruction was reached that held the noose to a diameter of five inches. Other obstructions, like the first one, were ranged below it, and, equally spaced, extended over six inches of the length within the noose. These obstructions were of black horse-hair,

deftly woven through the lariat, and gradually increasing in thickness downward, each one ended abruptly, the whole forming a series of cones with their apexes pointing toward the coils above. With little effort he pushed the loop along the first cone and over its base; but could not force it back, although he tried with all his strength. The cone spread under a reverse pressure and formed a perfect obstruction to the passage of the loop.

Nat Rapps meditated upon the possible intention of the instrument.

“Now a neck might be held within the noose to a throttling, yet not to death. Inextricable. No hand could break the noose or slip the loop beyond the dilated cone. The man could see and hear, could feel and know, yet he could not cry aloud. He would fall upon the ground and struggle. Memory would taunt him, and fear would paint an Inferno about him. . . . A foot against his breast; another cone above the loop. Now a suffocation, yet not of death. He could not hear, but he could see, and breathe

slowly; he could feel and know. Seconds would become decades, and minutes ages. Memory would leave him, and all the pains that fear had foretold would now burn upon his brain. . . . A foot upon his neck; slowly the lower cone draws through the loop, and a knife blade flashes. With naught but noose and loop and cone upon his neck he will die. Let him die alone."

Having mused about these possibilities, Nat Rapps laid the lariat aside and gave his attention to other articles. The coat had been much worn, but the exposed parts were not faded. "Worn only by night," was his thought, as he examined the outside pockets. One was empty. From the other he drew a narrow leathern sheath, and from that a steel table knife, the blade having been ground down to half its length and width. Its edge was whetted to the sharpness of a razor. Searching no further, he loosely coiled the lariat and slipped it, together with the knife, into the broad inside

pocket where he had found it. Tying the bundle securely, he gave it to an officer who tossed it into the store-room.

Nat Rapps returned to the street and walked slowly toward the office of the *Investigator*, thinking of the bundle. From his thoughts a painter might have drawn the scene that revenge had stamped upon the brain of Juan Bermuda.



## CHAPTER XVI.

**T**HE essence of the thought which had fixed a smile on the face of Chalmer Grose when Seraltha's head rested in sleep upon the pillow near to his, might have entered her brain, and, lurking inert throughout the night, filled it with unpleasant fumes upon her awakening in the morning. The flush of renewed vigor that suffused her face upon returning consciousness, sank into pallor when her sight fell upon the centaurs pursuing the frightened maidens in the fresco.

She turned her eyes from these toward the painting, as if to find confirmation of her debasement. In the clear light the black robe of Night seemingly hung out from the canvas, like a veil to Immodesty, the figure behind it displaying its outlines through the meshes.

The measured breathing of Chalmer Grose, by whose side she had rested from her vigils,

told her that he was asleep. Blood suffused her face with shame. The centaurs, the maidens, and the symbol of Night became reproachful witnesses. She pressed her hands over her eyes. Scenes swept through her mind in discomfiting array, and they bore a semblance to the thoughts which had set the smile upon the face of Chalmer Grose when she reclined beside him, stroking to soothe his simulated pain: "The surgeon, sitting by the bedside at midnight with contemptuous smile; the attendant, diligent in his morning service, yet meanwhile looking askance suggestively; a whispering group in the office below, indulging in jest or loud guffaw; a brilliant company at Monterey, pointing scornful fingers; a friend approaching her on the street, who turns before they meet, and, with quickening footsteps, enters an unaccustomed shop; an ardent admirer of 'Mission' days stalking by her, disdainful; herself in vain search of neighbor and employment."

Sobs shaking her body, bore the anguish of a violated soul. The clock in the dome of the



City Hall began to strike. She sat suddenly upright, and, with face now white, counted the strokes: "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven!" Thirteen hours she had lain unconscious in the guise of frailty!

Still sitting, she turned so that she might look upon the place where she had slept. As if aroused to semi-consciousness by her counting, the sleeping man, moving his uninjured arm, passed his hand along the place where she had been and rested it upon her pillow. He fell again into a deep sleep, and a faint smile flitted over his face.

The blood returned to her cheeks, but resentment was now apparent in the deepening violet of her eyes, in the faint wrinkles that sprang from her disordered hair downward over her forehead and in her clenching hands. Her face and the movements of her form showed something from within her that had never before appeared.

She moved from the bed. Her resentment

strengthened when she stood beside it and looked upon the sleeping man; not upon the face, nor upon the broken arm resting in splints upon the counterpane, but upon the uninjured hand that rested against her pillow. While she looked, the heavy coils of her brown hair escaped, and, falling over her shoulders and about her waist, spread their lustre in a mantle upon her gown. As her hair fell, a broad pier-glass against the opposite wall flashed a reflection that borrowed a golden sheen from the sunlight sifting through the windows, and drew her sight toward it. She saw a maiden with uncoiled hair in an attitude and place appropriate to a wife.

She left the room hastily and went toward her chamber. At an angle of the corridors she met the attendant, who halted.

"Go to him carefully," she said, "do not awaken him."

Quickly passing to her chamber, Seraltha made hurried preparations for a journey, and was then driven, together with her steamer

trunk, to the railway station, where she entered a sleeping-car of the noon train for San Francisco.

At one o'clock Chalmer Grose awoke. In the meantime Seraltha's departure had become known to the attendant, who immediately informed him of it. The smile that had covered his face when he awoke gave place to a cloud of anger. He turned his head and looked upon the place where she had slept. Her fan lay half-opened near her pillow. He seized it and crushed it to fragments.

To Seraltha the train seemed a swift and sure deliverer bearing her homeward, and the soft upholstery of the sleeping-car seemed to move in caressing embrace as she reclined upon it and saw the out-lying streets of the mountain city passing swiftly behind her. Happiness, expectancy and the thankfulness of deliverance kept with her as the train swept on its downward course through a long mountain gorge beautiful with trees and waterfalls, and emerged upon a rocky plain below. She soon wearied of

the uninviting scenery of the plain and gave notice to the people who journeyed with her.

In the section behind her a middle-aged gentleman of self-possession met her glance with a respectful air as she turned and looked in his direction. Across the aisle a girl of ten years, who in the full glee of unaccustomed travel, had romped from seat to seat in the vicinity of her sedate mother, became quiet when Seraltha gave her attention and gazed at her with admiration. A well-dressed elderly woman in the section fronting her, who sat in seeming melancholy, moved in cheerful response when Seraltha addressed her. A newly-married couple seated beyond were aiding to enliven the car by their decorous amiabilities. The girl of ten became merry, and her sedate mother animated. The middle-aged gentleman became gallant and the elderly woman confidential.

A greater share of this cheer was granted to Seraltha. In the companionship of those about

her she forgot her experience at the hotel, until the train halted at an eating-house at twilight. When she stepped to the landing, upon her way to the dining-room, a stout man who came from a forward car, walked toward her and kept by her side to the entrance of the station. As they walked she noticed that he constantly regarded her. At the dining-table she saw that from his seat, which he had taken nearly opposite her position, he endeavored by smiles to attract her notice. He was well-dressed, and his face was florid. His table manners were those of a gentleman.

While he ate he conversed with those beside him. He spoke of recent happenings at the mountain city, and of the mines and mountains thereabout; praising the hotel fare, and significantly added that he was returning to San Francisco, where he hoped to be recognized by a sympathetic person whom he had seen during his absence, and who resided in that city.

As he conversed Seraltha felt her head drooping and that her food was becoming tasteless,

although she had taken none since the previous evening. She knew that he was speaking to her. Her indignation was aroused. She raised her head and looked across the table, full into his face.

“By what right do you insult me?” her eyes asked, and then their glance fell to the table.

He had leered suggestively as his glance met hers. He was one of those who had raised her from the floor as the black horse entered the hotel stable with his message in blood.

He knew of her acts. She saw the world's opinion expressed in the eyes of one man. She finished her meal and shrank away to her seat in the sleeper. When the train drew away from the station, the merry little girl of the afternoon stood in the aisle beside Seraltha's seat, with her face full of sympathy; her mother peered over her shoulder from the opposite seat; the elderly woman looked wonderingly over the back of her section; the middle-aged gentleman was silently indignant, and the newly-married

man whispered to his bride. Seraltha was lying on her seat, weeping convulsively.

The porter entered and disturbed the scene. He stood beside Seraltha and spoke her name. He handed her an unenveloped note. As she read she slowly arose from her seat, and, standing upright in her section, she tore the missive into narrow strips. Breaking these, she laid them in his hand. The porter knew the significance of this action, and returned the torn note to the party who had written it. He who had smiled upon her before, now uttered indignities, among which her chastity was denied, and in his anger he loudly gave his interpretation of her movements in the mountain city.

When the porter returned to his car, Seraltha asked that her berth should be prepared. As she opened the curtains to retire behind them, the child in the opposite section bade her "good-night." Tears again came to her eyes and suffused her cheeks when she responded. She drew the curtains and threw herself upon the berth. Neither the tearing of the note,

nor the darkness within the curtains, sufficed to obliterate from her sight the words written upon it. They flamed in a dark abyss, that opened to her eyes as she sank her face deep into the pillow:

“SERALTHA AMES—

“My silence can be secured. What is your address in the city?

“A GUEST AT MONTEREY.”

The envenomed lines seemed a flaming rattlesnake, her name its head, and the pseudonym its rattle. The abyss became a gloomy plain, bringing the serpent nearer. She sprang away from it, and, kneeling upon her couch, she saw it in the darkness about her pillow, a maleficent hallucination. She threw the curtains aside for escape, and the light from without effaced it.

Fevered and trembling, she again rested her head upon the pillow, and, as the night wore away, her thoughts dwelt upon the humiliation. In the place of welcome, when she would again return to “The Mission,” she now saw a leer. It met her everywhere—from windows, from



half-closed doors, on the streets, and in the shops. It went with her to the church, and pierced her with a thousand thrusts. Her dire imaginings dwelt upon evil. A classmate came before her who had strayed from propriety; Seraltha saw her stretched upon a marble slab, water dripping from her hair. Another came who had walked wherever her fancy led. She had fled before the calumny of neighbor and kin and sought employment. Calumny pursued and took the wages from her hand. She had gone from her home in "The Mission" northward through the city, abiding awhile in seclusion. Her master had cherished her for a season, and then encouraged her to drink. He knew that when a woman is falling, wine will plunge her downward as a clod descends. She became shameless, and he drove her from him. She followed the downward path to the companionship of those who revel among the terraces of the "Barbary Coast."\* Seraltha had

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\* A local name given to an immoral section of San Francisco, lying along the northern wharves, and including the slopes of adjacent hills where time-worn wooden houses rise to the view in apparent terraces.

been told of her after she had fallen, and once used her best efforts to reform her, but failed. The expanse behind her had uplifted, and the path was vertical. Fancy showed her now, standing with unlaced shoe and tattered gown, her dulled eyes leering across the waters of the bay toward the incoming train.

The loitering morning came. The rising sun brought a land breeze that pushed the ocean fogs from the Oakland shore, rolled them over the bay and banked them in a mask of pearl against the city beyond. A steamer followed, bearing those who had arrived by the mountain train. As it lay against the dock Seraltha was the first to go on board, hastening as if to escape detection. Passing far forward, she bent over the rail and drew deep breaths from the cooling air. Others came about her and observed her disordered hair and crumpled raiment. As the steamer drew away from the landing, a watchman approached and warned her of her danger. When she turned, he saw a fevered flush upon her cheeks. He led her to a seat near by and

stood beside her. The place where she had been was a vantage-ground for suicide.

While she sat she looked out upon the bay. A steamer, in counter passage, plunged out from the bank of fog along the further shore, and trailed broad bands of glistening foam among the ships at anchor in the stream. Far up the bay smaller craft busied the waters with sail or panting steam. Oceanward, swift tugs and careful steamers passed in and out the Golden Gate, through fleets of fishing tartans whose lateen sails dipped the leeward water and rose in crescent white against a pyramid of fog.

As the steamer neared its dock the land breeze fell, and gusts of sea wind swept through the Heads. Chasing up the bay, they pierced a broad rift in the bank of fog that lay against the city. Seraltha hid her face when her eyes fell upon the moss-covered roofs uprising in terraced outline along the "Barbary Coast."

The steamer touched its dock. The passengers pressed forward, and, hastening to the landing, streamed away to waiting street cars

and carriages, except Seraltha, who still remained upon the forward deck slowly walking to and fro. The watchman, now fully aware that she required assistance, asked her where she wished to go.

"I do not know," she answered drearily.

He escorted her to the landing, which they had scarcely reached when Lethe St. Pier came toward them from a waiting carriage. When they met, Lethe exclaimed:

"Here's mah Honey! Lah, lah! Mah eyes see her comin' toh me. Chile, chile! Speak toh me. Yoh's full ob fever! Has you been 'bused? Chile! Look on me! Come 'long ah me. Chile, chile! Doan yoh see me? Lethe St. Pier! Come! Nobuddy 'buse yoh in Lethe St. Pier's house."

As she spoke the latter words her earnest face seemed to Seraltha an assurance of deliverance. The watchman stood amazed as she closely encircled Lethe's shoulders with her arms and repeatedly kissed her dusky face.

They entered the carriage, which was driven to the house on Pine street.

Seraltha went to her bed in the gorgeously-furnished chamber, where she passed a sleepless day. In the evening, Lethe St. Pier called a physician, for Seraltha was then kneeling upon the bed, clutching her hair and looking wildly about her in apparent delirium.

When the physician arrived, Seraltha still knelt, but her hands were clenched tightly by her side, and her sight was fixed upon her pillow. As he approached the bedside she counted slowly:

“ One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven!”

“ It is not in her blood, but in her brain,” said the physician. He was an expert in mental disorders.



## CHAPTER XVII.

**W**HEN the anger of Chalmer Grose had expended its force in the breaking of Seraltha's fan, he sent the following telegram:

"HAMILTON TUCKER,

*San Francisco :*

"S. left angry, noon train. Arrive there 7, morning. Have St. P. meet. Get a carriage. Drive yourself. Take to Pine street. Keep S. there. Hold you responsible. Don't fail."

Although the message was unsigned, Hamilton Tucker knew its source and meaning. He was also aware of the importance of the concluding sentences. A crisis in the affairs of his superior had arrived, demanding action. "Take! Keep! Don't fail!"

Force could not be considered. Persuasion promised a failure. If she had fled before Cæsar, she would evade his retainer. Threats might defeat his purpose. Calumny, having already touched her, might prove unavailing.

Hamilton Tucker had reached his limit. He studied the dispatch and solved the problem. He wrote something upon the message and went to the house on Pine street. He knew of Lethe's illiteracy, and when he read the message to her it declared:

"LETHE ST. PIER:

"Seraltha will come to-morrow, 7 in the morning. Meet her at the ferry with a carriage. Take her to the Pine street house. Keep her there. Don't fail. I hold you responsible.

"CHALMER GROSE."

Hamilton Tucker employed a man to drive the carriage from the ferry to the house on Pine street, and took a retired position, where he might see, unobserved, the efforts of Lethe St. Pier to meet the demands of Chalmer Grose. When Seraltha met Lethe, he was as much amazed as had been the watchman, when he saw a rapturous meeting and an amiable companionship on the way to the carriage.

This occurred in the morning of the day in which he visited the grain ranch. On the even-

ing after his return he called at the house on Pine street, and gave evidence of mental relief, when Lethe St. Pier met him at the door with this information:

“Seraltha is afflicted with intermissive delirium, which will require many weeks of seclusion and perfect rest to overcome. That is what the doctor says,” she added.

“And she can’t get up and go out till she gets well,” said Hamilton Tucker.

“An’ nobuddy gwine toh take her out long’s Lethe St. Pier is livin’. She’s been ’bused—’bused long anuff.”

Hamilton Tucker took one step backward as the tall form in the doorway seemed to expand.

“It’s all right,” he responded, “I know she will be safe with you.”

Nevertheless, after a correspondence between himself and Chalmer Grose, in which this clause appeared in one of his letters—“Lethe St. Pier is a friend of the girl”—a man of stealthy manner rented a room in the house opposite to that in which Seraltha had refuge, and watched



through the window shutters during the day. Another, like him, walked about the streets, on the steep driveway and over the rear grounds, in the hours of darkness. A man of stooping shoulders, who wore a slouch hat, held an interview with each one when he began his undertaking.

After the third night, the man who walked about did not go upon the grounds, and approached no nearer to the house than the opposite sidewalk.

"On this night," he said to a man who interviewed him, "and about 3 o'clock, after resting upon the low stairway of the rear porch, I went along the causeway toward the barn. I was half-way over, at the point where the causeway is highest above the ground, when I heard a rustling sound, and immediately after was leashed by a rope holding my arms tightly to my body. Before I could make an outcry, I was thrown violently upon the causeway. I was then drawn over the verge, from which I fell a distance of eight feet to the ground below. I then became

unconscious. Upon recovery, I was aware that my arms were freed, and as I sat upright my hand grasped the rope, which I brought away with me as evidence of my adventure."

He showed the rope to the man who listened to his story. It was new and had been kneaded to pliability. It was nearly four feet in length, and held a spliced loop on one end. On the other end two of its three strands had been severed by a sharp knife. The third strand was broken, as if by great violence. The man carefully examined the rope, and then said:

"You were lassoed. A Mexican did it. He did not come near you. He was on the ground below you, and got your shape against the sky. He got away with the rest of the rope by pulling the sound strand apart, where he had cut the others."

The man who made this decision was Chance Neely, of the private detective agency.

The purpose of Chalmer Grose, resolved when he sent the letter of invitation to Seraltha requesting her presence with himself and friends

on the mountain excursion, had been accomplished, although not in the way he had intended—the ruin of her reputation with the aid of scandal.

A beautiful girl had forsaken her occupation, and, after flashing her presence before the wealth of Monterey, had gone upon a journey of pleasure. Conducting herself then with impropriety, she had returned and taken shelter in a house of unsavory history.

This was the warp that her aspirations had thrown about her, and scandal plied the woof to a robe of deepest dye. No need for her mother to tell her, when she visited her, that her name was a bye-word on the streets of "The Mission," and a reproach in the homes which once she had cheered. She heard the whisperings in her chamber by night and by day, and heard the rustle of silk, swept aside by scornful hands. In the reveries of convalescence she had found no wish to meet those with whom she had associated, or to see the outside world. As health returned, she shrank more closely within

her chamber. The man who walked in darkness about the streets, and he who watched by day, had no useful occupation.

Hope never tires in device. If spurned, it returns with other invention. It has a design for every condition of life. It brought one to her as she reclined upon the sofa in her chamber. She was immaculate! Was he so enamored that he would wed to possess her?

When this expedient presented itself, her soul turned away from it. Although scorned, it persistently returned, always with alluring promises. "It would uplift, perhaps restore. In fruition, her pathway would be lighted. He would admire her beauty; he would respect her virtue; he would be gratified for her devotion. Perhaps he would love her." "Love!" She hysterically repeated the word many times, and began the counting: "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven!" As she counted she arose and knelt upon the sofa. Grasping her hair, she looked steadily toward the pillow.

This relapse of her affliction came in the fourth week from that of her arrival from the mountain city, and, being less severe than the first attack, it was restrained within ten days. In the meantime, Chalmer Grose had so far recovered from his injuries that he could be removed to his rooms in the Hotel Havencourt. After his arrival there, being still an invalid and unable to go abroad, he summoned Lethe St. Pier to his apartments. His messenger was Hamilton Tucker, who, on the evening preceding the day of Lethe's ordered attendance upon her employer rang the door-bell of the house on Pine street with much misgiving; but its scope did not reach to the unexpected, which did happen.

As he stood by the door in waiting he heard movements within, and saw through the stained glass in the lintels that full light was being given to the hall chandelier, which was suspended several yards beyond the entrance. The door swung open, and remained stationary at a right angle with its frame. While it was open-

ing he stepped inside the hall, but halted as the interior came to his sight.

Lethe St. Pier stood upon the lower one of the stairs, her left hand resting upon the newel. No other person was in view. She could not have opened the door. In the instant that brought this fact to his mind, Lethe recognized her visitor. Seizing something which stood behind the newel she stepped to the floor of the hall and raised it toward him. He saw far down the double barrels of a sportsman's gun.

"Don't come!" she said, as she drew the breech against her shoulder; "and don't go! don't move!—yes, you may do that," she added.

He had leaned heavily into the angle of the wall and door-casing as he looked along the barrels of the gun to the hammers, both full drawn.

"And this is not the only one," she continued. "You can look at the door."

He looked, and saw double barrels protruding beyond the door, held by some one who stood behind it.

“That,” she said, “is for the man who has been prowling ’round my house night times, if he is coming behind you, or anybody else coming with him. And don’t you speak, only to what I am going to say.” Hamilton Tucker shrank closer into the angle. “You have come to ask Miss Seraltha to go away with you, and if she won’t do that, you have come to take her away. Just that same doings been ’round this house before, but nobody can get a carriage up the back way this time. I’ve done boarded up the passage through the barn, in and out, and any carriage coming to my house any more stops in the street, right in front, and nobody gets carried away from my house, unless she wants to go; and Miss Seraltha don’t.”

“Mrs. St. Pier!” (Hamilton Tucker hesitated and struggled for speech, then continued.) “I don’t want Seraltha. I’ve—got no—carriage. Nobody’s with me. Mr. Chalmer Grose wants—you to come—to the Hotel Havencourt; he wants to see you to-morrow afternoon at three o’clock.

Put—put away the—gun, please! There's no—no use for it."

"I suppose," responded Lethe, stil holding the gun in position, "that you are telling the truth. I am going to let you off, if you will hold up your right hand and promise to find the man who is prowling 'round my house night-times, and take him away with you."

Hamilton Tucker's right hand went up, and the promise was ardently given. The gun still remained in position.

"And you tell Chalmer Grose if he wants to see Lethe St. Pier, he is welcome to come to her house any day-time, by the front way, and nobody will hurt him. He needn't send for the shotguns, and the two rifles, and the three revolvers in the cupboards up stairs, for the lease of this house says: 'and everything that is in it.' Now, you may go."

Hamilton Tucker departed. As he reached the sidewalk at the foot of the granite steps, he looked upward and saw the light slowly fading from the stained glass of the door. On a street



corner near by he met the man who had walked about in darkness, and conversed with him. After they had separated, the man went to the room of his confederate and peered through the shutters into the dim gaslight that threw misty gleams against the castle of Lethe St. Pier.

Hamilton Tucker called at the rooms of his employer early the next morning and related the facts to him. He was much astonished, after he had imparted his information, to know that Chalmer Grose received it without evidence of anger. He was further surprised when, upon the completion of his story, he was told to call at the private detective agency and command the withdrawal of the two spies from their stations.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

**T**HE rooms of the suite occupied by Chalmer Grose in the Hotel Havencourt numbered six, being a union of two suites by the cutting of a door between. The first room was in an angle against the principal and side street, and the others extended along the side street and a main corridor of the floor upon which they were situated, to an exclusive corridor, into which the further room opened. The rooms within the angle, and that upon the exclusive corridor, were spacious parlors. An observant visitor, passing through the interior of the rooms from the angle would have noticed, first, a frescoed parlor, gorgeous with inharmonious colors on curtain, divan, and carpet; second, a chamber with greater discord in colors about a canopied bed; third, a dressing-room with similar colors reflected in heavy pier glasses; fourth, a dressing-room with harmonious colors, draped

easel-mirrors, and a subtle perfume, not of flowers; fifth, an adjoining chamber, with the added purity of white; sixth, a parlor, decorated and with harmonious tints on curtain, divan and carpet. Passing thence into the exclusive corridor, the visitor would have noticed the absence of doors in the wall of the opposite room, and that the suite of rooms through which he had passed were secluded from all others upon the floor.

During the two weeks following the arrival of Chalmer Grose, he rested, at first upon the canopied bed, and afterward upon easy chairs and couches in the gorgeous parlor. Later, occasional visitors entered the rooms. These were officers of the Sierra Nevada Mining Association, who gave sympathy and congratulations, and otherwise aided to break the monotony of his convalescence. At the end of the third week he had so far recovered as to be driven abroad in his carriage. After a few days he entered his carriage attended by his valet, and was driven to the house on Pine street.

Lethe St. Pier met him at the door and ushered him into the reception room. As he turned from the hallway to enter this room he furtively glanced into the angle behind the front door. When he was seated he gave the same attention to possible places of concealment about the room.

"I called to speak with Seraltha," he abruptly said, when Lethe had seated herself near him.

"Your man said Lethe St. Pier is who you wanted to speak with." Her response gave evidence of opposition.

"Yes—then, about a new mine. Spiritual affair. Wanted to know about what was in it. I will see you some other time. Just as well when this is taken off." He pointed with his right hand to the silken sling in which his injured arm lay. Continuing, he said: "Bad injury—side, too. Troubles me now. I shall do no business until I get well. Thought I would, when I sent for you."

Lethe St. Pier was foiled and the thrusts that

she had intended were forefended. She sat a moment in thought, and then said:

“Miss Seraltha has been very sick—crazy-like. Something happened up there in the mountains.” She looked intently at him, and, as thoughts of Seraltha’s version of the happening came to her mind, she again showed opposition.

“Yes, it was terrible,” he responded. “Enough to make any one crazy. Besides, she was awake so long, caring for me. My fault; but I was in great pain. Gave no attention to time. Afterward she slept too long. I did not know that it was dangerous for her to do so, until the doctor told me the next day. I could not bear to awaken her—she had been so good to me.”

Lethe was foiled again, and satyr was in transformation to seraph. Hesitating but an instant, she arose from her seat, exclaiming:

“Dah lubbly chile! She done got mistaken. Dah good Lawd’s hearin’ me—I’s thankful! I’s gwine to her dis berry minit. She’ll say

yes. I'se thankful, en dah good Lord's a knowin' ob it!"

Leaving the reception room she ran up the stairway to the vestibule. He heard her footsteps along the floor of the parlor above him, and in the room beyond. Craftiness came among the wiry muscles of his face.

After a long delay Lethe came to him with the information that Seraltha would meet him in the parlor. Lethe returned to Seraltha and assisted to dress her in the ashes-of-roses tea-gown, and coiled her hair exquisitely. Long seclusion within her room had effaced the inherited firmness of labor from the outlines of her form, and in its place had bestowed the lithe and delicate grace of luxury and ease.

The delirium from which she had suffered left a slight impress upon her, manifested by an unrest and by abrupt and emotional speech. Her eyes sometimes deepened in color, and moved their sight rapidly over the person with whom she might be in conversation. She would draw deep inspirations when thus engaged.

These manifestations had not been continuous, and seemed to move upon her as tides move, not diurnally, but with the lunations. She was upon the ebb of this tide—yet not at its lowest—when Chalmer Grose entered the parlor to converse with her. She sat upon an armless upholstered chair beyond the broad front windows of the parlor furthest from the vestibule.

As Chalmer Grose entered he walked with confidence to meet an inexperienced girl; but as he passed under the embossed arch connecting the parlors, a woman calmly waved her fan toward a sofa placed in a position where the light from the window fell full upon his face. As he sat, he at first looked away from her through the window, toward the shutters where the spy had watched. When he turned his face toward her, he saw the blue within her eyes deepening to violet amidst the shifting flashes that darted upon him from head to foot; and fancy showed him the three revolvers glistening in the chiffonier of his abandoned

chamber, which she now occupied. Impelled by this, he arose; but her eyes now calmly met his.

“I meant the best toward you,” he said, hastily, and again took his seat. “There was no harm in your resting by my side. You were good to me; and I loved you. I had resolved to wed you—if you would—when I was fully well. It was upon the tongue of everybody in the mountain city that you were to be my wife, and”—He hesitated. She looked intently at him, but, as she made no response, he continued: “It was a pleasant situation, as fair as could be in the midst of calamity. I thought of it in the intervals of my suffering, as you came about me in gentle care. I felt a cheer that soothed the pain when at its greatest violence.”

He spoke the latter sentence looking out at the window; but hearing the sound of a deep inspiration, he turned his face toward her. Another followed, and then a third. He mistook their meaning, and resumed his speech



with ardor. "Your touch and your near presence were anodynes to my anguish, and were healing while I was yet bleeding."

Approaching her, he seized her hand and raised it to his lips. She quickly withdrew it and stood before him, still looking into his eyes, but now as if bewildered.

They sat again in their respective places, and as Chalmer Grose contemplated the uninjured hand that rested upon his knee, his face showed agitation. This was soon quieted, and he resumed his speech, repeating his first assertion:

"It was a pleasant situation, as fair as could be in the midst of calamity. It should have remained so to the end. We could then have wedded with propriety—if you would—and with applause from all the world. No scandal would have sought you. Your devotion to me had disarmed it.

"You went from me—by stealth, it seemed to others—as if you tired in the companionship of an invalid. Then men began to talk, in the hotel and in the city—men who know the

world—and they said: ‘She stays with pleasure, but goes from pain. She is not to be his wife—she is something else.’ What they said came with you upon the train and spread abroad in this city. It grieved me; but grief cannot undo what has been done. I can shield you from further calumny, and honorably. Shall I continue?”

A carriage was passing by, and her sight followed it. When it had disappeared around the corner, she turned quickly toward him and said:

“You may continue.”

“We can marry, if you wish, and as I shall advise; and time will clear us both from reproach. Society menaces him who would wed where it has defamed, and business men look askance upon him. Should you consent to aid in my protection from these grievances, I can aid you to a restoration of that which has been taken from you.”

He moved upon his seat so that he might

— speak toward, yet not fully look upon her, and continued:

“The Courts of California—and justly, too, (for, what two persons may do concerns them — none others) — concede the privilege of matrimony to those who agree with each other, in writing, to assume that state. This writing is a marriage certificate. The marriage may not be known to society for years, if the parties so will, and they may still possess its benefits. We can do this, and remain together in secrecy, as I will explain to you, later on. When society has forgotten your mistake, in its attention to those of others which will follow, we can appear in public as man and wife, without dishonor. You may be satisfied of the legality of this form of marriage by consulting with any lawyer in San Francisco. I should wish you to be satisfied. I wish to do right by you, and I ask a like consideration for myself.”

“Would society forget?” This inquiry bore a tone of doubt, yet it expressed eagerness and something of hope.

"Society has fads and whims," he answered, decisively. "They are laid aside and forgotten. This year it makes assertions and the next year denies them. One year may be sufficient for our seclusion."

"My mother will be happy again!" she exclaimed, almost gleefully, and then suddenly became agitated.

Chalmer Grose looked at her in astonishment. This was an involuntary expression of a thought, but he accepted it as a yielding to his proposal.

"Your mother should not know until we have made it public. She would not comprehend. She could not keep your secret. We will provide for her comfort. This can be arranged. No one should know except Mammy St. Pier, and she should not know the reasons for secrecy. She is your friend and will keep your secret forever, if you tell it to her in a dark room at midnight. Tell her. She will aid us. But do not tell her the reasons. She cannot comprehend"—

Seraltha had become composed, and interrupted him : " You are assuming too much. I have not consented."

" I speak subject to your consent—for the benefit of both, it seems to me. This provides a way to free us wholly from difficulties. Upon reflection you will consent, I believe. I will speak further, with your permission." She was silent, and he continued:

" We can live as befits our station. I command in the Hotel Havencourt, and am obeyed. I will be consistent with you. You should know details. I should arrange two suites of rooms as one, opening into separate corridors. Guests of hotels are mindful of their own affairs, and you could occupy, seemingly, your own suite, and I, mine; each passing in and out through separate doors without notice from others. Beautifully furnished they are—would be—and we can live there pleasantly retired. Every luxury will be ours, except that of society, and of this we shall be deprived only a year or two. It is not what I had thought, but

it is the best that we can do. It is for my good and yours. Seraltha, I love you! I ask you to be my wife!"

Hermína's words flashed into her memory, and her lips began a repetition: "By him it may be spoken in lust." She checked this demonstration of her affliction, but her eyes wandered over him. Her words drew his attention to her, and fancy again showed him the three revolvers glistening within the chiffonier. This time a certain fear came upon him. He cowered under her glances.

"What is love?" She leaned far forward in her chair. Her eyes became steady as she added—"Your love?"

"To—give good, to—do good to one whom I have selected to be my wife from among all others—if she will accept." He drew a breath of relief and moved toward her.

"The definition of mine," she responded, "is a devotion of myself to one who can bring about me the better things of life. If this is sufficient to you I will accept, under the conditions that

you have made—if a marriage by written agreement is allowed by the law.

He sprang to her side, as if to embrace her. She shrank from him. He caught her hand and raised it toward his lips. She drew it away.



## CHAPTER XIX.

**I**N an evening of the week following that in which the promise of Seraltha Ames was given, Hamilton Tucker and his wife Hermina were at their office, No. 12 Hotel Havencourt Block. The curtains of the windows were closely drawn, and after a short conversation he locked the door and put the key in his pocket. He then went near to Hermina, who sat at her desk reading a paper of legal pattern, and, with an imprecation, vehemently said:

“There’s been coaxing enough and there’s been nonsense enough on your part. Now you have got to copy that writing in perfect imitation. You can do it. The right or wrong of it has got nothing to do with you or me.”

“But I shall not copy it,” she answered, decisively.

“Then I’ve got no more use for you—neither here nor elsewhere. But I can crush that non-



sense out of you." He seized her neck and bent her head forward over the desk. His grasp tightened, and his sight rested upon the soft black hair in glossy coils above his thumbs. She did not struggle, and amidst a silence that seemed to force itself into the room and congeal around him, he heard the faint clicking of coins and the almost inaudible voices of men. The cinch-room was beyond, and men were there in numbers. Muffled sounds of footsteps came through the walls; the nearer measured, and the distant blended into a murmur, yet all were hastening with approaching tread. He looked away from her, toward the cinch-room, and toward the walls behind him and upon either side. He reflected an instant, then loosened his grasp. Kneeling, he drew her face to his, and, stroking her cheek, pleaded for forgiveness. She recovered and drew away from him.

He arose, and, gathering the papers upon her desk, carefully placed them within his own cabinet. He went with her to their lodgings,

and although she was constantly silent he was gallant, attentive, and apparently contrite. As he continued his amiabilities for three days, she began to accept his repeated assertion that his heart was all right, but that his judgment had been overwhelmed by sudden anger. She granted him forgiveness, and as a recompense he proposed that they should close the office for a day and together visit the grain ranch of Chalmers Grose, where, he said, it was then necessary that he should make a tour of inspection. She assented, and on the following morning they boarded a train which would convey them to a village situated a few miles from the northern boundary of the ranch.

Arriving there at noon they dined and afterward secured a horse and carriage, by which conveyance they drove toward the grain ranch. On the train Hamilton Tucker had been attentive and respectful to his wife, and while it did not restore to her a full measure of happiness, her heart felt light, and the scenery seemed doubly beautiful. They were now in the

valley of the San Joaquin and driving toward the south. Other valleys confine the sight to narrow limits, or diffuse it into a dull horizon. Here immensity enthralls the sight. The Sieras rise in the east, awe-inspiring in their remoteness. Banks of cloud, gathered in mists from the ocean and floating high over Tehachapi, border it in the south; while an undulating line along the western sky traces the summit of Coast Range. From these the sky arches in unbroken azure. Within lies verdure and broad streams, and the wealth of grain and fruit and flowers.

After a short drive on the public road, Hamilton Tucker turned the horse into an unfrequented way, by which they arrived at the limit of the ranch farthest from the dwellings, which were two miles distant, and hidden from sight by a ridge. Another ranch spread in an opposite direction, the distant buildings being hidden behind a similar ridge. A barbed-wire fence enclosed the property of Chalmer Grose, giving admittance through a heavy gate.

As they drove through the gate, faint, noxious odors came to them upon the southern breeze. As they advanced, the odors became stronger, and in the distance dark objects circled about in the air. Advancing farther, they approached a deep ravine, its sides covered with willow and nightshade. He drew the horse to a halt. Hoarse sounds of contention and the rustle of wings arose from the ravine. Above it, shrill screams of alarm came from the beaks of circling vultures.

Hamilton Tucker descended from the carriage, and, without speaking, detached the horse from it and secured him to a rear wheel. He then went near to Hermina and looked up to her. As if the exponents of death, floating in the air above and contending in the ravine below, had foreboded evil to her, the flush of gratification that had spread over her face, faded, and the faint wrinkles traced by shame and contrition deepened into alarm.

Hamilton Tucker pointed his finger down the ravine. The deadly fruit of the night-

shade clustered in dark bunches along the side, and the willows swayed over them in suggestive drooping. Her eyes followed the motion of his hand. "No one ever goes down there, except those that have died," he said. "No one ever sees them again. They go to the mountains at nightfall with the vultures."

She looked at the mountains. The wall of the Sierras seemed swiftly to approach, and the cloud over Tehachapi expanded toward her.

"I have something for you to do," he continued, "if you do it we will go away together. If you don't do it, I shall go alone, and to-morrow, at nightfall, you will go to the mountains with the vultures." He drew from a pocket the manuscript that she had refused to copy, then her pen; from another a small bottle of ink, together with blank paper of legal pattern and a tablet upon which to write.

He laid them upon the seat beside her and raised the half-opened canopy of the carriage. Stepping back three paces he commanded her to write. She made no movement. He

folded his arms across his breast, waiting. Her head drooped against the stanchions of the canopy, her eyes closed, and her face became as a lily in whiteness.

The screams of alarm from above had ceased; and the sounds of contention and the rustle of wings in the ravine below had increased in volume as she slowly revived to consciousness and looked upon him as he stood, still waiting.

“Write!” he said; but she made no response.

Placing his right hand within his waistcoat he drew a stylet from it. The weapon flashed its beveled surfaces against the sunlight and his chest heaved with gathering determination. She gazed upon it as if fascinated, and then with an effort drew her sight away. She looked rapidly over the slope upon her right, and then to the one upon her left. No one appeared within her sight, and none could hear an outcry. The sun was declining, and the sounds of contention in the deep ravine were becoming more discordant.

He advanced toward her. She raised the tablet from the seat, and, placing the blank papers upon it, began to write. She did not use the manuscript in copying—the words had burned themselves into her brain.

When her writing was completed he tore the manuscript into shreds and threw them into the ravine. The copy he put into an inside pocket of his waistcoat, together with the stylet. Looking at his watch, he said:

“We will now return. There is time to make the evening train by good driving.”

He attached the horse to the carriage and drove rapidly over the unfrequented road toward the village, and they arrived in time for the train to San Francisco.

Hamilton Tucker had made no tour of inspection upon the grain ranch of Chalmer Grose; but, with the aid of the vultures of the mountains, he had effected that which long afterward was a standing point for vultures of the law as they tore at the heart of a woman.

## CHAPTER XX.

**A**S the days passed by, and Seraltha reflected upon the proposal of Chalmer Grose, she became satisfied with its terms. Socially his position appeared to be far above her plane; that he should strive to protect himself there, seemed proper. Again, she had not kept faith with society in that which it most strenuously required of her—a blameless public deportment. She had betrayed it, unwittingly, surely, but nevertheless essentially. Her exclusion from its benefits, for a year or two, in consequence, began to assume the character of a suitable penance. Besides, he made her frequent visits, and with regrets, amiabilities and promises of future happiness, aided to dispel her misgivings.

“To be sure,” he said to her one day, as he sat in the double parlor, “I cannot put all the blame of our discomfort upon you, although I



was in great pain and scarcely responsible. While I am forced to assume a part, I still give my thoughts to our future happiness. I see clearly through to the time when all these clouds will have passed away, and we shall be in sunshine. We will aid each other to that end."

"And I am becoming aware," she responded, "that I was imprudent, and appreciate your generosity."

After an hour spent in pleasant conversation he arose, and, taking her hand, held it in his. She did not withdraw it. He stooped and kissed her. She returned the kiss coldly.

He praised her dress for the evening when their agreement should go into effect and went away in a pleasant mood. The ceremony of signing the agreement was appointed for an evening within two weeks from the date of this visit, in the house on Pine street. They were to go thence to the Hotel Havencourt.

That the affliction which had left slight traces upon Seraltha was wholly mental, became evident from the almost total disappearance of its

manifestations when she was thus relieved of apprehension. A certain mobility of her eyes when engaged in conversation was all that now remained, and this was of a nature that merely gave animation to her countenance.

In the manner suggested by Chalmer Grose she had imparted her secret to Lethe St. Pier, who received and buried it under crosses over her heart in Seraltha's chamber at midnight. In her elation that the girl—whom she now undoubtedly loved with all the strength of her intense nature—was to realize her aspirations, although in an unconventional way, Lethe gave full expression to her emotions. She spoke of the prophecy which was now being fulfilled, and insisted that her powers be applied to a discovery of methods to insure future good fortune. She spent the remainder of the night in this purpose, while Seraltha slept in the peace of deliverance.

While waiting upon Seraltha at breakfast the following morning, Lethe gave the information that she had received in the dark room by the

furnace. The prognosis had been pleasant, and she was in ecstasy.

"I waited, en waited, en bimeby spirits come. Den I whisper toh dem, 'My honey wants her forchin.' Den dey whisper, 'We's dillinatin' spirits. Look in dah flame ob dah lamp, en wait.' Den dey doan speak any moh, but I knows dey was dar, all 'round me.

"I looked in dah flame, en waited, en waited, en waited; en 'twas so long I'se knowin' somefin good is comin' foh shuah. Bimeby dah flame 'gun toh grow, en it grewed up, en out. Den a spider come stringin' down froh dah ceilin'! Right onto dah table befo' me! Dabs dah mostes kind ob good forchin when dah spiders come stringin' down. Den I see somefin colorin', right in dah middle ob dah flame. I whispers, 'Dat's apple-blossom!' Den it went away. Musn't whisper when dillinatin' spirits is 'round—mus' think. Den I looked more, en waited. Dar 'twas agin! Same like dah firs' time! Den I think, 'What's apple-blossoms gwine

toh do foh my honey?' I 'spected orange-blossoms.

"Den dah color growed, mostes up en down, en it 'gun toh shine. Den I look, en I think, 'Dats plush!' Den it growed, en dah flame got white en glittered on it. Chile! Chile! If dem spirits let yoh see dat I'se done call yoh down dar in yoh night-clos', but dey wouldn't. Jes' dah be-u-tifulest dress ebber yoh see!—'cept a shuah-nuff weddin' dress. Dah train reach 'way out, mos' as fur as dah flame, en dah flame jes' as big as dah room. Den pearls come round dah neck ob dah dress, big as dem pebbles on dah sho' where dah water splashes up, en dey shine—down on dah dress; en sometime I doan know if it's white, en sometime I doan know if it's pink. Chile! Yoh autoh see it!

"Den I think, 'Whose's dat dress?' Den mah honey's slippers come under it, en dah gold toes peak out in front. Den her arms come in dah puffs on dah shoulders, jes' like marble, en dey fold demseves cross dah waist, en waited. Den a bunch ob apple-blossoms

come in dah right hand! Dey tremble like somebuddy's inside dah dress, en waited, en waited.

“Den I think, ‘Ain’t dem dillinatin’ spirits gwine toh show me no moh? Dis is bad forchin for shuah, if dey doan.’ Chile! Den mah eyes see dah blessedest face! Jes’ like dah spirit ones. Den I knows yoh’s dar sister, en dey’s gwine toh keer foh yoh. Dat was yoh face! It ’gun toh grow like dah earthly one, en bimeby dah eyes grow so bright dat dah pearls doan shine no moh. Den dah flame went away, all ’cept dah lamp-light dat I was lookin’ intoh.”

It was a copy from this vision of apple-blossom plush, and the necklace of pearls, which Lethe insisted Seraltha should wear as a harbinger of good fortune on the evening of the signing of the contract. It was this attire to the wearing of which Chalmer Grose gave approval just after he had placed his first kiss upon the lips of Seraltha Ames.

Madam Convincia Hitts afterward came to the house on Pine street and made a gown like

that seen by Lethe St. Pier in the flame of the lamp. The necklace of pearls was clasped around Seraltha's neck by Chalmer Grose, just before signing their agreement.

The appointed evening arrived. Lethe had removed the obstructions from the passage through the barn, and at nine o'clock the carriage of Chalmer Grose stood by the rear porch of the house in waiting. The rains of early autumn, approaching from the sea, threw their fitful outskirts over the sky, veiling the moon in gray and pearl. The southwest wind, laden with the bouquet of ocean sedge and mosses, rustled the trees and shrubbery. Inconstantly the gas lights flickered in the streets, pushing their dim lustre along the verandas. At times it paled, and, wasting its sheen upon the ground below, threw weird shadows of bush and trellis along the lawns.

The winds increased, the dampness grew heavier, and the shadows deepened. The coachman closed his coat from chin to boot, and waited.

Within the parlors were flowers and foliage,

in vases upon the tables and in festoons along the walls. A horseshoe of smilax and tuberose opened over the curtains that hung at the exit to the vestibule. These had been arranged by Lethe St. Pier, and they filled the parlors with fragrance inappropriate to the scene which transpired that evening about a mahogany table that reflected the light of a chandelier from its polished surface.

Seraltha sat beside the table, robed in the gown of apple-blossom plush. The pearls of her necklace reflected their pale light upon it as she moved, and her marble arms, tapering into mosquetaire gloves, vied with them in clarity. She was serene and self-contained. She discussed with Chalmer Grose the terms of the agreement, a copy of which she held before her. He held a corresponding paper, and upon it was written the word "Original."

When Matrimony consults a lawyer the blush is taken from its cheek, and to her who is about to enter its chambers a like contact brings audacity. With a copy of the agreement in her

possession, provided for her by Chalmer Grose, Seraltha had consulted authorities in relation to its legality. Intent upon this purpose, she had visited a building where many lawyers had offices, immediately after agreeing to the proposal of marriage. Selecting at random from among the names displayed upon signs along the corridor, she hesitatingly entered a door. The occupant being temporary absent an usher escorted her to his private office, where she sat awaiting his return. Within a half hour the lawyer arrived. During this interview, the first lesson in duplicity was forced upon her. The lawyer had been one among those of the reception at Monterey.

"A friend," Seraltha said, in answer to his inquiry, "requests me to consult you regarding the legality of this writing."

She laid it before him. He carefully read and re-read it. He then said:

"It is an agreement of marriage. Does your friend wish my opinion upon the advisability of a marriage of this kind? "



The words of Chalmer Grose flashed to her thought—"What two persons may do concerns them—none others"—and fortified her against that which might be good to know, but which was foreign to her inquiry. "I want your opinion of its legality and proper wording," she answered.

"What is the age of your friend?" the lawyer asked.

"I do not know," Seraltha answered, disquieted lest other questions should reveal her position to him. She looked away from him to her hands, which were caressing each other upon her lap.

"If she is past eighteen," he slowly said, "her signature will be legal and the instrument valid, if both parties are in accord.

"And the marriage will be the same as any other?" She inclined forward and looked intently at him as she spoke.

"Legally," the lawyer answered.

A faint smile came upon his face, disclosing the nature of his opinion, but which Seraltha

accepted as one of entire approval. Legality to her untaught comprehension included all the rest.

The lawyer saying no more upon the subject, Seraltha paid his fee and departed. As she walked along the corridor, suspicion suddenly entered her mind. "The lawyer was at Monterey! He saw her there in company with Chalmer Grose. Was he desirous that the form should be approved? Was it not even he who wrote the form? Was he not a counsellor to Chalmer Grose? He had smiled as he gave his opinion. Was it of satisfaction? Might it not be a trap, yawning with dishonor and shame?"

She selected another name, far down the corridor. It was easy now to enter where before she had hesitated. The occupant showed her to his private office, where she sat beside him. She was not abashed when she told him her mission. She spoke plainly about herself, and calmly discussed with the lawyer the legal questions involved in the marriage agreement. His opinion was in accord with that already

given. When she went again to the corridor there was that upon her which comes to a woman from dalliance with the law—deterioration.

While sitting at the mahogany table, Chalmer Grose did not open fully the paper superscribed "Original;" but as he read in response to Seraltha's comments and inquiries, he closed the folds, except the one upon which the clause in discussion was written. When she announced her satisfaction, he drew a deep breath of relief.

Seraltha directed Lethe, who sat near by in waiting, to bring writing materials from her dressing-room. When these were placed before them Chalmer Grose opened the lower fold of the "Original" upon the table, and, holding the remaining folds together, he wrote his signature upon that which was unfolded before him. This he dried with a blotter, giving it a heavy pressure. He then took the copy, which she had placed upon the table, and signed it as it lay, full opened. He then gave the pen to Seraltha, who wrote her signature upon the copy

underneath his. This done, he laid the blotter upon the signature, afterward taking the copy in possession. He then gave her the "Original." She wrote her name under that of Chalmer Grose. Thus Seraltha Ames became Seraltha Ames Grose.

"Keep the original for yourself," he said; "it is all in my own handwriting, and I will retain the copy. Put on your traveling suit and prepare your trunk. We will take it with us."

As Seraltha began these preparations in her dressing-room, with the assistance of Lethe, Chalmer Grose retained his seat at the table. When they had been absent a short time, he took a slip of paper, that fell to his lap when he removed the blotter from the original, and noiselessly tore it into fragments. He then went to the vestibule, and stepping out upon the veranda, threw the fragments out into the dim gas light. The wind bore them in a snowy scud to the pavement of Pine street.

The change of dress was completed; the coachman had placed the steamer trunk on the seat

beside him and covered it with a lap robe. Chalmer Grose escorted Seraltha to the carriage, and, taking a seat beside her, closed the door. The curtains had already been drawn.

As the carriage turned upon the causeway Lethe St. Pier stood in the rear door of the house, and soliloquized:

“Foh dah Massah, dat’s dah curusess weddin’ I’s ebbber seed on dis yearth! No cahds, no ’gratulations, no ministah, no judge—nobuddy! Jes’ writing! Nobuddy kiss dah bride—he doan kiss her hisself! Nobody frow things after dah carriage, en it’s done gwine to rain.”

Large drops spattering upon the floor of the porch near her feet, and an increasing darkness announced the approach of a storm. “Foh suah, I doan know what dem folks comin’ toh. Dah apple-blossom dress dar only salvation. I’s hopin’ for dah chile. Chile! Lethe St. Pier’s hopin’ foh yoh, en dah good Lawd’s knowin’ ob it.”

The carriage had passed slowly down the steep driveway and along the side street as Lethe was

speaking. It was now out of her sight. Closing the door she went into the parlors and sat upon Seraltha's chair by the mahogany table in deep meditation.

As the carriage went down the streets toward its destination, the rain increased and formed turbid rills behind the bridal party, strewing dross along the pavement in lieu of rice.

At eleven o'clock they reached the Hotel Havencourt, and entered their chambers—the bride and groom of that espousal which is not of Heaven, nor yet of the good of the earth—A Contract Marriage.



## CHAPTER XVII.

**MEANWHILE** the marriage of Colonel August Garrison and Mrs. Katie Twohy had been celebrated. After a bridal tour they selected a suite of rooms in the Hotel Havencourt. The suite was upon the same floor as that of Chalmer Grose, and directly opposite, across the main corridor.

About two and one-half years afterward, while sitting in her parlor engaged in needlework, Mrs. Garrison heard sounds of contention from the opposite rooms. Her door was open. A child of twenty months built fortifications of blocks upon a rug before her door, and charged them with drum and feet. Repulsed at times by gravitation, he made renewed attacks, with increasing noise and merriment. Victorious, he built again, and again attacked.

It was during the intervals of these attacks that she heard the sounds of contention. They

were subdued in tone by the closed doors and transoms of the room from which they came, yet their nature could be understood. A man was reviling a defiant woman.

The sounds increased, so that the child ceased the building of his fortifications, and listened. Suddenly the sounds grew fainter, as if transferred to another room. The child resumed the building, and prepared his drum for attack. He had made his first breach in the works as a woman's screams came from the corridor.

The woman advanced rapidly to the main corridor, and the words rang through it distinctly: "I am his wife! I am his wife! I am his wife!" until she stood before the fortifications of the child shaking out the folds of a paper. The child stepped aside while the woman advanced toward his mother without seeing his fort, and, stumbling over it, she fell heavily along the rug.

As Mrs. Garrison recognized the prostrate woman she hastened to her side with the intention of assisting, and then ordering her from



her parlor. She had reasons for this action; yet when the woman arose, and, unmindful of her fall, gently repeated the words that had rung along the corridor, she felt misgivings of the right of her purpose. Leading her to a seat, she said:

“Compose yourself before you speak further.”

Pity is conscious of sex. It is active toward the opposite and passive toward the like. Mrs. Garrison called the nurse, who removed her child, while she resumed her needlework. Her thoughts returned from the cause of her lenity toward the woman, who now sat upon a sofa earnestly endeavoring to quell the tumult in her brain, to the reasons why she should expel her from the parlor.

These were many, notwithstanding the probable truth that she was the wife of Chalmer Grose. She had entered a respectable neighborhood and had brought reproach upon it. She had been a subject for the tongue of scandal. She had resided there stealthily. She had withheld the marriage relation from its social uses

and confined it wholly to selfish ends. She had discovered that her position was an improper one, and was now endeavoring to enter upon the right by the aid of sympathy from those who were established there.

Especially affecting Mrs. Garrison, her continued presence in the Hotel Havencourt had been a taint upon its popularity among the circles of best society. True, she had been unobtrusive. None could have asserted that she was widow, maid or wife, without appeal to surmise, yet the air along that corridor seemed dense with mystery, and many who had visited there remained away because of her presence.

Yet, all these reasons for her expulsion from the parlor were outweighed in Mrs. Garrison's final decision, by a thought that came to her when she raised the prostrate woman from the floor. "The fortifications which society built against her entrance to the pathway of error were like those the child built before the door;

weak and below her sight, yet sufficient for a tripping and a fall."

Seraltha Ames Grose had approached tranquility while Mrs. Garrison reflected, and now came to her side with the paper that she had exhibited at the door. Mrs. Garrison read it carefully. It was the marriage contract, superscribed "Original," which Chalmer Grose had given to Seraltha across the mahogany table in the parlor of the house on Pine street.

"I consented when this was signed," Seraltha said, after Mrs. Garrison had returned the paper, "that our marriage should be kept a secret for two years. That time has now passed, and he insists upon an extension of this secrecy, its termination to be subject to his will. I will not consent. I am his wife! I am his wife! You are not disgraced by my presence here. I cannot live longer and know that you believe me to be in disgrace. I am his wife! I will inform everybody—the ladies who live upon this floor, who turn their faces away from me as I pass by them; their husbands, who look

disrespectfully at me when I meet them; the men in the office, who gaze after me as I go upon the street, and the men who leer at me as I drive in the park. I will tell them all: 'I am his wife! I am the wife of Chalmer Grose! I was his wife when you treated me disrespectfully. Here is the evidence!'" She unfolded the paper and held it opened above her head. "I will shout to them so that all will hear: 'it is a marriage certificate! It is legal!' I cannot live another day as I have done for two years. Two years! It seems an age! Oh, my Father above! let time pass by me as it once did! I will tell them all! Hear me!"

She hastened toward the door, but Mrs. Garrison took her by the arm and gently led her to the sofa. She sat beside her, although uneasy, because of the darkening of Seraltha's eyes, and the rapid movement of their sight from place to place over her person.

Rational action is the result of a harmonious combination of mental faculties, of desire, impulse and judgment. Nervous derangement,

from that of apprehension to that of mania, destroys judgment and imparts its vigor to impulse. Another mind may supply the deficiency by speech or other influences. Hence hypnotism, which has no control over a fully rational mind.

Mrs. Garrison unconsciously exerted this power upon Seraltha. Each woman, as she became seated upon the sofa, turned to confront the other. In unison with the movement of her eyes Seraltha's hands opened and closed the marriage contract, the rustle of paper disturbing the quiet of the parlor. Gradually this movement ceased. Her body inclined towards Mrs. Garrison, and her sight became fixed upon her face. She then sat motionless, except for a slight inclination forward.

Something of sympathy must have mingled with what she was receiving, for tears began to brim her eyes, and, sinking through the lashes, trickled down her cheeks and splashed upon the marriage contract that now lay folded in her lap. Others followed and spread the ink

among the inner folds. Mrs. Garrison awaited until the flow of tears had ceased, and then said:

“The methods that your impulses propose are not sufficient for your relief. By their use you will only confirm a belief in your social degradation. There is nothing consistent in your marriage, that you should proclaim it to society and wish to continue under its open observation. There is no protector, as nature intended there should be. Your husband holds you forth to the scorn of all, and when you resent this action he reviles you. He has no love for you. Love never conceals its object. Nor can any good accrue to you in the continuance of such a state. Discord in the home is a cancer that destroys the symmetry of society. The dishonor of a loveless marriage outranks the dishonor of Marguerite. And your marriage is loveless, even to you. Love would not submit for a day to what you have endured more than two years. It would rather seek oblivion in suicide.

“What benefit will you derive going along the corridors, or upon the streets, proclaiming,

‘I am his wife?’ You but announce a dishonor equal to that which men have already imputed to you. Better far that you should appear in Court and demand of the Judges, ‘Make me again Seraltha Ames. I am now Seraltha Ames Grose, in dishonor. Free me from it.’”

Mrs. Garrison’s words had a visible effect upon Seraltha; but she was not conscious that she controlled her subject by a power more subtle than language or logic. She gave credit for this result to the force of right, which she felt the words conveyed. Her positive nature demanded action immediately upon a decision, and being by the effects of experience and thought in active sympathy with the means of relief that she had suggested, she strengthened her control by command.

“You have decided,” she said. “You must go immediately to a lawyer. I know of one whom you may trust. I will go with you to him. Go to your rooms and prepare for the streets. I will meet you at your corridor in a few moments.”

When Seraltha arose to obey she gave greater evidence of hypnotic control than when seated. The marriage contract dropped unnoticed by her to the floor, and she walked directly toward her dressing-room, encountering with much force the wall near which she had been sitting, afterward returning to Mrs. Garrison, who led her to the door of the parlor.

Seraltha reached her dressing-room without further difficulty, and was soon attired in the surah silk gown of graduated flounce and zouave effect, together with the English hat, that still bore the ostrich pompons originally placed upon it, and the satchel of oxidized hook and chain. She had worn this costume only upon a few occasions before her marriage, but never afterward, until now. Mrs. Garrison noticed the unfashionable attire, but she was too much engaged in thought to make objection to its appearance upon the street in her company.

Mrs. Garrison had discovered the marriage contract on the floor. She secured it and carried it in her hand until they reached the office



of the lawyer. When they entered, Mrs. Garrison walked in advance of Seraltha, and approaching him, as he sat before his desk with his side face toward her, she placed the marriage contract in his hand and said:

“A memory of your good services to me in the times of my greatest need for advice has caused me to bring one to you who has found a deeper dishonor than that from which you assisted my escape. She will ask your aid to free her from it. Mrs. Seraltha Ames Grose, I introduce you to the Honorable Abel Hyman.”

Mrs. Garrison had stepped aside as she made the presentation. His face came fully to Seraltha's sight when his name was spoken. Mrs. Garrison's influence upon her was suddenly dispelled, and Seraltha became oblivious to her presence. Without a word, she knelt by his side and hid her face in her hands, which she rested upon his knee.

Abel Hyman had made no response to the presentation, nor did he move to disturb her. He unfolded the marriage contract and read.

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The stain of tears had blurred the words, and he held it close to his eyes, and yet closer after he had finished the reading. Mrs. Garrison softly retired, closing the door as she passed out.

The half-forehead that showed above the paper which Abel Hyman held before his face rose to iron-gray hair, worn long and pushed directly backward upon the crown, revealing broad open spaces upon either side that showed lines of thought, and the love of grandeur and beauty. The crown extended uncommonly far to a back-head of excessive fullness. As he sat, his figure showed a commanding presence that would stand in towering antagonism when he arose in opposition, and when he lowered the paper, noiselessly folding it, antagonism to that which he had read shone intensely through the moistened lids of his deep-set black eyes and spread over his smooth-shaved face, which strongly expressed the rigor of his profession, but which inclined to the firmness of equity rather than to the severity of law. The flush of physical vigor overspread his face. There appeared in

his movements and attitude an evidence of determination in self-defense—not of the quality which covers a retreat, but of that which holds a weapon for an assaulting enemy.

Chalmer Grose had called him, “Desperado! Murderer!” He was born a Virginian, yet there mingled in his blood the coldness of the Puritan with the heat of the Chevalier. Strong influences had directed his boyhood and controlled his earlier manhood to finished social conduct.

“Who steals your purse,” said his social monitors to him, “will fall into the chains of the law. Withhold your own hand from him. For him who would despoil your honor with insult the law has no punishment. Be therefore a law unto yourself. The code of the Duel is your remedy for assaults upon your honor.”

The Duel is a midway terrace upon the elevation that society is ascending to reach the purity of right above. It overlooks the terraces of War, of Servitude, of Superstition, of Ignorance, and the plane of Animalism. It spreads next below

that of Equity, and upon the façade between them, rules of civility, of courtesy, and of decency, are deeply engraved upon tablets adorned with barrels of steel and crowned with crossing swords.



## CHAPTER XXI.

**A**BEL Hyman laid the paper on his desk and looked steadily out through a window to the street below, as if an enemy had uprisen there. His face hardened with anger. Low moans escaped from the woman, who still knelt by his side with her face pressed closely against the hands upon his knee. He turned away from the street—not to her, but to the paper on his desk. While he yet looked at it he placed his right hand upon her shoulder. The moans increasing, he raised her head from his knee and drew her hands away from her face. There were no tears upon it. As her sight met his she saw kindness and compassion in his eyes. Her moaning ceased. He assisted her to a seat beside him, which he placed so that the light fell directly upon her face. He said:

"If you have employed those methods in your relation to another which he has used in his behavior toward you, lay them wholly aside during your conference with me. You have dwelt in hypocrisy more than two years. Your integrity cannot be less than tainted by this contact. Return to rectitude, and tell me fully of your association with him before and after marriage, and of the incidents, letters and conversations, leading up to your consent to this contract."

She told him all. Two hours were consumed in the recital. She had spoken without blame to any, except herself and her inglorious aspirations.

"He is entirely worthy of me should he now publicly acknowledge me as a wife," she continued impulsively. "I am his wife! Aid me so that the world may know!"

He sprang to his feet and moved back and forth before his desk as if she had struck him with a heavy weapon. His face gave evidence of contending emotions. When he sat again he asked, composedly:

“Why are you inconstant in your purpose? Why did you come to me asking for a divorce, and now ask my aid to strengthen your bonds?”

“I do not seek a divorce. I have no thought of a divorce.” She answered positively, and astonishment covered his face as she continued: “I have not asked for a divorce. I am his wife! The years for secrecy have passed. I want a recognition. I want your aid. I had thought of you, but had no thought of coming to you. Why I came I do not know. I only know that I am here, and that before I came my husband distracted me with threats because I insisted upon the announcement of our true relations. I have spoken truthfully. Aid me. I am his wife! I am his wife! I will inform everybody—the ladies who turn their faces away from me; their husbands, who look disrespectfully upon me; the men who gaze at me when I go upon the street, and they who leer at me when I drive. I am his wife! I am the wife of Chalmer Grose! Go with me to tell them this.”

Arising from her seat, she seized his arm and

drew him toward the door. His full strength was required to resist her, and his full powers of persuasion to quiet her.

Of all the indications of troubles that affect mankind, those revealing the presence of mental disorder are the least understood by people who are not instructed by study or ample observation. What Abel Hyman saw, as Seraltha sat before him obediently, touched a congenial quality in his own being. In the flashing violet of her eyes he saw determination, and in her deep respiration a preparation for conflict. When she afterward exclaimed: "If not a recognition, then death!" his soul responded.

That which did exist behind these demonstrations was a mind groping among the mists that fall and rise upon the border-land of lunacy. The exclamation foreboded no harm to Chalmer Grose. She saw a rift through the mists by which she might escape.

"I will aid you," he said, "even to the utmost extremity; but we must proceed with propriety, and within reason. Your declaration of the



marriage will not establish a belief in its existence. You have no witness to your marriage, and—”

“Yes!” she exclaimed, “Lethe St. Pier, of whom I have told you.”

He looked at her an instant with an expression of pity, and then resumed—“and his assertions will outvalue yours in their influence upon society. He may deny the contract. He may even assert that it is a forgery, and large sums of money will then be required of you to establish its genuineness. It is your only proof of marriage. Why did not your witness sign it?”

“She can neither read nor write, but she saw our signatures made to the contract, and saw us go away together. She knew that we were to be married, and arranged flowers for us in the parlor. It was a marriage. Is it not legal? Lawyers told me that it would be. I consulted them before I gave consent.”

He turned away from her and again looked out through the window toward the street below. She did not disturb him, but respectfully awaited

his answer. Her patience had merged into wonder, and this into disquiet when he again looked at her.

Unmindful of her inquiry, he gave directions for her future procedure:

“Go directly to Chalmer Grose,” he said to her, “and quietly demand of him to come with you to my office and confirm this contract to me, and those who may be waiting here as witnesses. It is now noon. I will remain here until 5 o’clock. Should he refuse, take yourself and your wardrobe from the Hotel Havencourt and seek a shelter among your friends. Remain with them until he requests an interview. Refuse to meet him, or any one whom he may appoint, until he shall address a letter to you that bears an acknowledgment that you are his wife. Retain this letter—should you receive such—and submit it to me. I will keep your marriage contract in a secure place. It might be taken from you, even by force. Advise me of your future location. Go now; I must give attention to other affairs.”

She arose and approached the door. As she stood upon the threshold she impulsively said:


“He will not allow me to go from him. He will declare me to be his wife.”

“Seraltha, fortify yourself against hope,” he responded; “he will not.”

Abel Hyman did not give attention to other affairs during the afternoon, neither did he leave his office. He sat long and thoughtfully after Seraltha had retired, then read and re-read the marriage contract. He afterward arose and paced the floor, sometimes in thought, sometimes in agitation. At 5 o'clock he stood by the window looking steadily out toward a fixed point in the street below.



## CHAPTER XXII.

PON returning to her rooms in the Hotel Havencourt, Seraltha entered her dressing-room and removed her hat and the gown of surah-silk. Pushing an ottoman before an easel-mirror, she sat upon it, and, uncoiling her hair, re-arranged it in puffs and waves above her forehead, in broad plaits beyond, caught in intertwining loops that, touching her ears, spread in lustrous masses between them and downward upon her neck. When the liberated coils fell from their restraints, the face in the mirror reflected apprehension; but now confidence spread in smiles below the shining waves, and faith shone steadfastly from her eyes. Her movements became buoyant and her expressions animated as she made other preparations for a full change of attire.

From the wardrobe she brought out a long silken bag, equal in length to her height, and

adorned along its seams with quilled ribbons of pink and blue, and upon the side opening, with buttons of pearl. She laid it upon her dressing-table, and, loosening the buttons, uncovered the complete attire worn by her on the evening before her departure with Chalmer Grose from the house on Pine street. Delicate garments of agreeing tints nestled within the folds of the gown of apple-blossom plush, and satin slippers with golden toes showed from among them. Disrobing then, she began to clothe herself from the silken bag.

She soon stood before the easel-mirror and smilingly began the final adornment. She held up the pearl necklace, then, drawing it to a circle, she moved it to and fro, watching the constant lustre. Her lips moved as if she whispered to it.

She drew the necklace about her throat, and, passing through other rooms to the parlor of Chalmer Grose, she stood before him, a re-appearance of his bride. He had just returned from his noon-day luncheon, and, notwithstand-

ing the quarrel of the morning, he seemed in excellent spirits. From the date of the marriage contract to that upon which she demanded full recognition of their marriage relations, he had maintained a pleasant demeanor toward Seraltha; but the love, for which she hoped, he had never manifested. He did not even pretend this by the use of endearing words, although she had persevered with act and language to verify the maxim, "Love is love's reward."

A condition of mind controlled his deportment toward her of which she had no comprehension. His soul was not masculine, neither was it feminine. He and the many of his type are unaffected by woman's words or by her tears, by her devotion, or by her love. They look upon her as a thing of utility, and coldly calculate their speech to her, except when in revilement. He was incapable of love for a woman, yet he wished to retain Seraltha to himself. He had heard her anguished words of the morning ringing through the corridors, and knew of her conference with Mrs. Garrison, for whom he

fostered an extreme hatred. He also knew of their departure from the hotel in company, and of Seraltha's protracted absence.

A crisis had arrived. He had given the hours of her absence to thought and a consultation with Hamilton Tucker and Chance Neely, whom he summoned to his parlor. Afterward he admitted them to Seraltha's rooms, where they wrote in memorandum books while passing through and making observations within them. A half hour after they had retired Chance Neely returned to her rooms, and remained within them several moments alone. What he then accomplished he afterward disclosed to Chalmer Grose, who smiled approval. He also smiled as if already a conquerer when Seraltha stood before him, arrayed in her bridal attire.

"I compliment myself," he said, after a full survey of her, "because you are more charming now than upon the night when I clasped the pearl necklace in place. Your beauty rivaled it then; now the pearls are in submission. A

quiet life agrees with you. You would be unwise to disturb it. The greatest disappointments of life are brought about by not letting well-enough alone. Be consistent with your situation. Will you be seated?"

He arose, and, assisting her to the chair that he had occupied, he walked up and down before her as he continued his speech: "It is a pleasant situation—far above that in which you were before you came to me. You are in luxury, and are treated kindly—when you do not annoy me with demands. You live at ease, and may continue to do so. You have all the pleasures of life, except the unsubstantial pleasure of society, which now seems to be the object of your ambition and"—

"This is not my ambition," she interrupted calmly, "I will avoid society all my life, and devote myself to you as I have done, if you will go with me and acknowledge me to be your wife, so that the ladies on this floor, and their husbands, the men in the office and upon the streets, will no longer dishonor me. I ask the



honor that you have promised me—nothing more.”

A continuation of his interrupted thought would be of no avail against an impulse of honor freed from social ambition. He lapsed into sullenness, scowling as he walked backward and forward before her in silence. He could construct no argument against her wishes, and command was the only resource remaining. Her eyes followed him as he walked, and calm determination possessed her face when he went to the inner door of his parlor, and, opening it, sternly said:

“Go to your rooms, and be content that you enjoy them upon my terms: the ceasing of your importunities, and the avoidance of Mrs. August Garrison and her friends.”

Her immediate and silent obedience appeared to him as a submission. The smile that greeted her entrance to his parlor returned. It lingered while he made preparations for a drive to the Cliff, in company with friends and brother officers of the Mining Association. Even while

there, in the enjoyment of a champagne dinner, the smile returned and aided the wine in spreading the jest around the table. It mingled pleasantly with a flush upon his face when he stood in his dressing-room at a late hour and made preparations for retiring. It vanished when he entered Seraltha's room and found it tenantless. A cloud of anger came in its place—like that upon his face while crushing her fan in the mountain city—when he discovered that her clothing was gone.

He lighted the gas jets throughout her rooms and walked about with increasing evidences of anger amidst the silence of the unexpected. After his anger had abated, he began upon an examination within the recesses of bureaus, chiffoniers, and the wardrobe closet of Seraltha's dressing-room. During his search, he found three cards in various places, which he read and returned to the places where he had found them. Upon one side the cards read, in printed form, "The Calaveras," also its number upon Market and the diverging street. Upon the other side

the name Monroe Chase appeared, in connection with dates that differed upon each card. These dates corresponded with those upon which Chalmer Grose had been absent from the city.

During the following day Chance Neely entered Seraltha's rooms from the parlor of Chalmer Grose. He made examination among furniture, as Chalmer Grose had done, and, finding the cards, he placed them within an envelope, which he put into an inner pocket.

Upon the evening ensuing, "The Three" sat long in conference around the table in one of the basement rooms of "The Calaveras," the door and area windows being tightly closed, and the conversation low in tone.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

**G**OOD investments in city lots had made Lethe St. Pier a rich woman. These increasing rapidly in value, and her rentals in proportion, she came into the enjoyment of a large income from them. The house and grounds on Pine street were kept in perfect order, and her occupations were reduced to their care and the practice of pyromancy. At the time of the events last narrated, she had attained to the height of her success. Many people of wealth—and some of wisdom, otherwise—called upon her for advice, paid her liberally for it, and acted upon it. These visitors never knew of her methods, because she held the consultations in the parlors, afterward retiring to the dark room by the furnace to solve her divinations. These completed, she would return to the waiting visitor and impressively announce her prophecies. She met her visitors richly dressed,

and adorned with heavy gold ornaments, but while she sat in the mutilated cane-seated chair before the oil lamp, she wore a gown of scarlet.

While in seclusion, Seraltha had made Lethe frequent visits. Her mother—to whom Chalmer Grose had granted a comfortable allowance for support—occasionally met her there, although feeling that she lived in dishonor until Seraltha read the marriage contract to her, at the expiration of the time for which she had promised secrecy. Seraltha had made none of these visits as a patroness of Lethe's arts, yet, through association, and observation of visits by people of gentility, she held to a belief in her pretended skill in divination. The knowledge of Lethe's increasing love for her gave aid to this effect.

This love now approached the fierceness that strikes to kill the one who menaces the slightest injury to its object; and when the carriage that bore Seraltha and her trunks from the Hotel Havencourt had turned from the causeway, and halted at the rear porch of her house, she min-

gled endearing sentences for Seraltha with fierce denunciations of Chalmer Grose. As she supported Seraltha toward the gorgeously furnished chamber, and felt her form trembling, denunciation strengthened. At the bedside Lethe hastily removed Seraltha's hat and wraps, and, lifting her as she might a child, laid her gently upon the bed. When she drew away from her and stood upright, she saw a wildness coming over the face upon the pillow, and violet gleams flashing from the eyes.

"Doan yoh do that!" she exclaimed. "Doan yoh count dem 'lebbens! Dey's full ob knives, en day cut toh dah blood in mah heart. Chile! Honey! Doan do dat!"

"One—two—three!" came from the pillow.

"Stop, Chile! I'se gwine toh kiss dem 'lebbens off yoh lips."

"Four — five — six!" intoned with Lethe's words. She bent over the pillow and pressed her lips against Seraltha's.

"Seven—eight—nine!" struggled out, their measures broken by Lethe's kisses.

A smile came upon Seraltha's face and her lips ceased to move.

"Chile! Chile! dah lebbens gone! Look on me—Lethe St. Pier. Yoh's in yoh own home. Yoh's smilin'! I'se thankful, en dah good Lawd's a knowin' ob it; I'se thankful. Come closer toh me."

She sat upon the bed, and, raising Seraltha's head from the pillow, she rested it upon her lap. Tears glistened on the bosom of her silken gown.

Information in detail of Seraltha's departure from the Hotel Havencourt spread upon a circle, the centre of which was the office of the hotel, and its circumference the widening limits of scandal. Long before this event her name had been whispered toward these limits. Through a long residence in the city the social methods of Chalmer Grose had become widely known as those of one whose conduct toward women was pledged to a special evil—pledged by a compact that dishonor had made with desire in the days of his youth. All women to

whom he gave social companionship, and who continued in tolerance of his gallantry, became like unto him in reputation. This fell with greatest force upon Seraltha, because her beauty, associated with decorous behavior, drew attention from the multitude, who marveled to know that apparent chastity dwelt in a chamber of gold, tapestried with scarlet.

Her name was now notorious. Reporters for the papers knew of her withdrawal from Chalmers Grose within a day thereafter, (Nat Rapps received his information within the hour), and one wrote a column of mingled facts and fancies unaccompanied by names or indications of locality. His paper published it so that all who read could comprehend the meaning.

On the third day after the arrival of Seraltha at the house on Pine street, and in the early evening, a caller rang the door-bell, who displayed a smiling face and an attire touching the extreme of fashion, when Lethe St. Pier opened the door and the light from the hallway shone full upon him.



"I have got a message," he said, in response to her salutation. "It is for the lady in this house."

"There are two ladies in this house, sir. Which one is the message for?" Lethe advanced toward him in full occupancy of the doorway.

"It is for the—the younger one. It is very important," he responded.

"Give me the message then, sir, and come to the reception-room."

She moved aside to allow an entrance, but he looked down the hallway to the darkness beyond the opened door of the area under the rear porch, and receded a step. He said:

"It is not in writing. It is a personal message. I will wait here until she comes to me."

A suppressed anger had appeared in Lethe's words when she asked him for the message, which now appeared strongly in her face as she returned to her former position in the doorway.

"Den yoh done stay dar dah whole year, en tell dah message toh dah birds. Whar's yoh

broten' up—wantin' to talk toh dah lady in dah doh?"

The caller stepped hastily off the landing. He halted from his purpose of descending the granite stairway to the street as she questioned:

"Who's dah name ob dah lady yoh's wantin' toh talk toh in dar doh?"

"Seraltha," answered the caller, turning and retracing a step.

"Who's dah full name? Tell me dat." She stepped out of the doorway to the landing.

"Seraltha Ames," announced the caller, hesitatingly, and nervously twirling his hat.

"Who's else?" demanded Lethe, stepping down from the landing to the walk.

The caller making no response, she continued:

"Mrs. Chalmer Grose is dah name ob dah lady here, en she doan want messages foh Seraltha Ames, en she doan want dem foh Seraltha. Dose folks done gone outen 'zistence. She's Massa Chalmer Grose's wife, en Massa Chalmer Grose doan want dah yuther folks to know dat. Yoh message wants Seraltha Ames toh come

toh Chalmer Grose, en dah's no lady by dat name to come toh him." Her anger gave place to earnestness: "Tell Chalmer Grose Lethe St. Pier's message: 'Mrs. Chalmer Grose will live in Lethe St. Pier's house until he says, "Mrs. Chalmer Grose, come back to me,"' and he must write the words, and not send messages by folks who don't know the lady's name."

The caller went away. Meeting Chance Neely on a near street corner he recited what he had said and heard. Chance Neely, by the aid of a street light, wrote this in a memorandum book, together with the day and date of occurrence. The caller was Monroe Chase, of "The Calaveras."

An hour later two physicians stood at the bedside of Chalmer Grose in the chamber of his suite. The odor of valerian and other drugs oppressed the air of the rooms, and sounds of groaning, with occasional labored breathing, broke upon their stillness. One physician bent over the bed, and, cutting away inner garments from the chest of the patient, he pressed his ear

closely over the heart. His associate administered medicine in frequent doses through a tube. Chalmer Grose was insensible.

Since his recovery from the injuries received at the Cascades, he had been conscious of an irregularity in the action of his heart, although the symptoms were usually slight and of short duration. Upon one occasion, within a year after his injury, and during a dispute over mining affairs, he had fallen from his chair. He then received the attention of a physician, who afterward advised the avoidance of all things tending to excite the sufferer.

Anger being the emotion most common to him, Chalmer Grose began a discipline for it that resulted in a control which allowed revilement in a tranquil expression; but when Chance Neely came to him, after the interview with Monroe Chase, and reported a failure of the scheme to communicate with Seraltha without recourse to correspondence by letter or by a call in person, he lost all self-control in anger toward Lethe St. Pier. He interrupted Chance

Neely in the midst of his report, and walked about the parlor in loud abuse of her. Later, he calmed sufficiently to hear the conclusion. When Chance Neely began upon Lethe's message he stopped and stood before him to the end. Chance Neely looked upward from his memorandum, when he had finished, and saw a face ghastly in its whiteness, that in an instant changed to scarlet. The form below it tottered, and then with an effort regained its energy. Chalmer Grose turned and walked rapidly toward his chamber door. He fell prone and silent across the threshold. Chance Neely hastened to the hotel office, whence his summons was sent to physicians, who, after arrival and an examination, raised the prostrate man from the floor and placed him upon the bed.

The physicians were successful in their efforts. At midnight, Chalmer Grose slept peacefully, his heart beating regularly. When he had revived, he requested that Hamilton Tucker be called to remain with him until morning.

Chance Neely, acting as messenger, went directly to "The Calaveras," where he found Hamilton Tucker in conversation with Monroe Chase, and in possession of facts connected with the call at the house on Pine street. During the time in which they walked together to the Hotel Haven-court, Chance Neely related what had happened in the rooms of Chalmer Grose, so that upon his arrival there Hamilton Tucker fully understood the situation.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

**A**T a late hour the next morning, Chalmer Grose awoke as one from a refreshing sleep, bearing no traces of the ordeal through which he had passed. He dressed hastily, and wrote upon a sheet of note paper, which he enclosed in an envelope, leaving it unsealed.

"Return this to me," he said to Hamilton Tucker, "together with a copy, at twelve o'clock to-day."

Hamilton Tucker went away and returned at the appointed time, bringing the document and a copy. Chalmer Grose carefully compared the writing, which appeared as if written by the same hand. These read:

"FRIDAY.

"MY DEAR WIFE:—

"While I wish your visit to be prolonged to the extent of your pleasure, I am now

hoping that after these several days of absence you may be in pleasant anticipation of an early return to me.

"I wish that you may be with me before Tuesday next. We will visit Monterey together on that day, and remain there for an undecided time. This will be pleasant to you, and a benefit to my health.

"I have not been in the best of spirits while you have been absent from me. Your presence is necessary to my happiness.

"Yours,

"CHALMER GROSE."

Chalmer Grose put the copy of this letter into the envelope and gave it to Hamilton Tucker with these instructions:

"Find a boy—one old enough, and who knows enough to do and say what he is told. Go with him until you get within sight of the house. Give him the letter. Show him where to go. Tell him to ring the door-bell. Lethe St. Pier will come to the door. Keep yourself away from her sight. Tell the boy to say, 'Madam, please give this to Mrs. Grose.' He is then to



put it in her hand, turn and walk briskly away. Keep on walking. If she calls after him, pay no attention. Give him gold. Tell him you will, before he starts out, if he obeys instructions."

That afternoon a boy rang the door-bell of the house on Pine street, to which Lethe St. Pier responded. His manner and speech were in full accord with those desired by Chalmer Grose. She took the letter and before she could make an inquiry regarding its author, he was well upon his way down the stairway. She called to him, but he walked briskly on toward the place where Hamilton Tucker awaited him.

After he had disappeared, Lethe turned the letter in her hands, looking upon it suspiciously. When she closed the door, she had begun a soliloquy:

"Dah boy says, 'Madam.' Dat's polite. Dah boy says, 'Dis letter's foh Missis Grose.' Dah boy knows dah name on dah letter. If dah letter's froh Chalmer Grose, dah's no politeness if he doan write any moh on dah outside dan

‘Missis Grose.’ Dah boy’s polite—he doan hear me when I say, ‘Come back.’ If dah’s any moh on dah letter ’cept ‘Missis Grose,’ dah boy’s done gwine toh read it dat way. Chalmer Grose doan give politeness toh Missis Chalmer Grose.”

She went into the reception room and sat before a table. Bending forward and holding the letter so that she might turn it about, she continued in soliloquy:

“En dah’s no love talk inside dah letter. Mebbe he says ‘Missis Chalmer Grose’ inside dah letter, but he doan say, ‘Missis Chalmer Grose, I loves yoh.’ How I knows dat? He doan stick dah leaf down so dah boy couldn’t read inside. Nobuddy says love talk en doan stick dah leaf down. Nobuddy wants dah boy toh read love talk, if ’tis toh dah wife. If dah’s love in dar, den dah paper all covered wiv talk—mebbe crossways. I’s gwine toh fine dat out, foh shuah.”

She drew the letter from its envelope and examined the writing, and looked among the

blank pages. The writing was upon the first page, and covered one-half the surface.

“One—two—three—four places foh writin’, en he doan speak only half a one. No love talk in dis letter, suah ’nuff. Mebbe dis say, ‘Missis Chalmer Grose, come back toh me,’ but he doan love her—jes’ wants her.”

She replaced the letter within its envelope and sat long in thought. A half hour had passed when she sprang to her feet, exclaiming:

“Dah lovely Chile! He’s had her toh his self mos’ three years, en he doan love her. If dah letter says: ‘Missis Chalmer Grose, come toh me,’ en dah chile wants toh, den I’se gwine toh fine’ a charm foh her dat’ll make Chalmer Grose love her. Dah charm got toh be sumfin’ most powerful. I doan know, en no yuther mortal folks knows, what’s gwine to git love intoh Chalmer Grose. I’se gwine toh ask dem spirits, dis very night, en if dey don’t know, den dah poor chile gwine toh live ’thout love all her bohn days. I’se gwine to tell dem spirits dey

mus' fine out dah charm, dis night, so dah chile can hab it to take wiv her toh him."

Lethe then went to the parlor floor and found Seraltha seated within a veranda, from which she obtained a view of the western limits of the city and of the cemetery on the sandy hills beyond. Lethe gave her the letter, and, sitting in a chair near by, remained in silence while she read it. Seraltha looked out toward the western hills in after-thought. She then folded the letter and returned it to the envelope. It afterward slipped from her hand and fell unnoticed by her to the floor. Her sight had become fixed upon a point in the distance.

Lethe took the letter from the floor and placed it upon Seraltha's lap, at the same time standing before her and obstructing her sight. Very tenderly she said:

"What's dah letter sayin', honey, dat yoh doan speak, but look straight out dar 'zif yoh see somefin 'twasn't in dah letter, en yoh nebber gwine toh git tired lookin' at it?"

Seraltha made no answer, and her sight con-

tinued steadily in the same direction that it held while being unobstructed. Lethe pressed closer, and, bending near to Seraltha, said, with increasing tenderness:

“Lethe St. Pier knows what wasn’t in dah letter, chile. ’Twasn’t love, en yoh’s nebber gwine toh find it ’twil somefin’ powerful is done toh chawm dah love into Chalmer Grose. Dis dah matter all dis time—he doan love yoh—jes wants yoh. I’s gwine toh fine out dah chawm toh make Chalmer Grose love yoh jes dah same as he wants you. Duz dah letter say, ‘Mrs. Chalmer Grose, come toh me?’ Chile! Speak toh me. Yoh’s tryin’ toh look frew me. What’s dat yoh’s lookin’ at, way out dar frew me, en doan fine in dah letter?”

“The cemetery!”

Lethe sprung away from before Seraltha when she uttered these words, exclaiming:

“Dah mercy, chile! Duz yoh see dah cemetery frew me? What’s dah cemetery showin’ toh yoh dat yoh doan fine in dah letter? Doan

dah letter say, 'Missis Chalmer Grose, come toh me?'

"It says, 'My dear wife, I want you with me.'"  
The answer showed a comprehension of the spirit of the letter.

Dat's what I say," responded Lethe, "when I see dah writin' doan speak only half a place—jes' wants yoh. 'My dear wife!' Dat means all dah same as Missis Chalmer Grose. 'My dear'! Dat's a fact, Chalmer Grose knows how toh speak two love words. If dey doan mean nuffin more dan 'I want yoh,' dey done make a little hole down toh his heart, en a powerful chawm gwine toh fill dah heart up frew dah hole. Yoh's lookin' at dah cemetery en thinkin' cemetery whilst I'se lookin' at yoh en thinkin' chawm for toh make Chalmer Grose love yoh. Dah chawm is somewhar in dah cemetery! Dah spirits gwine toh fine it foh yoh dis night. Come toh dah parlor."

Lethe arranged a seat in the parlor for Seraltha, and, sitting before her, unfolded a scheme to bring Chalmer Grose into the bondage of love.

“Honey, dah good Lawd’s done give ebbery-buddy dar love when dey’s children, en dey git so much dey can’t keer foh it by demselves—mus’ have somebuddy toh help dem. Some ob dem children grows, en dey keep growin’, en doan have nobuddy toh help dem keer foh dah love. Dey keep growin’ twil dey grow old, en den dey see somebuddy dey wants toh help keer for dah love, en dey looks ’round foh dah love, en dey doan fine it. It’s done got out en slipped away, en dey’s got no love wiv dem toh help keer foh.

“But it’s somewhar. Dah good Lawd breaves intoh it when he gives, en it doan nebber gwine toh die. It’s a chile spirit, playin’ wiv dah yuther childun somewhar dat dey’s keered foh. It’s happy dar, en if it ebber comes back it’s got toh be chawmed back, en dah chawm dat’s gwine toh bring one of dem spirit love-childun back dah yuther childun ain’t gwine toh pay no ’tention toh. I doan know, en dey’s no folks knows what chawm’s gwine toh bring back dah love-chile toh Chalmer Grose. I know whar

dah chawm is. It's in dah cemetery. It's a powerful charm—it mus' be foh toh bring back dah love toh Chalmer Grose. Dah spirits dah only ones dat knows jes' what it is, en I'se gwine toh talk wiv dem spirits all night, twil dey tell me. When dah spirits tell me whar dah chawn is mebbe dey'll say, 'Lethe St. Pier, yoh gwine toh be dah one toh git dah chawm.' Mebbe dey'll say, 'Missis Chalmer Grose dah one'. If dey say dat, chile, keep away dah skeer—it spiles dah chawm. Mebbe dey'll say, 'Lethe St. Pier, yoh go long wiv her'. If dey say dat, den dah skeer gwine to keep 'way froh you—skeer nebber comes 'round Lethe St. Pier. Dis is 'stressin' foh mah honey, but she mus' have dah chawm. Cemetery chawms alluz dah mos' powerful."

But little persuasion was required by Lethe to obtain the consent of Seraltha to this procedure, and also a promise from her to obey the commands of the spirits.

Seraltha retired early to her chamber with a new hope glimmering through the darkness of



disappointment and misfortune. An hour afterward, Lethe St. Pier went to the door, and, silently opening it, looked within. The sound of measured breathing informed her that Seraltha slept, and, entering the chamber, she stood at the bedside and looked intently upon her face. A faint tinted light flickered over it from the half-suppressed gas jets burning in crimson globes on the chandelier.

Lethe was now robed in her scarlet gown, that hung in unbroken folds from her shoulders to the floor, intensified in hue by the contrast of a kerchief turban of yellow and black, and of a white counterpane on Seraltha's bed. Raising her hands to the level of her face she extended her arms and passed them over Seraltha's form in repeated serpentine movements. She then stepped back and waved them in imitation of the wings of birds. Continuing this movement, she turned and looked steadily through a window into the darkness toward the distant cemetery. Her hands then dropped suddenly to her side, and, bending far forward,

she peered downward as if searching the depth of a chasm opening at her feet.

Retiring from the chamber, Lethe went to the dark room by the furnace and sat in the old cane-seated chair before the oil lamp. Bending forward, and with her hands clasped beyond it, she gazed intently into the flame. Hours elapsed, while stillness pervaded the house on Pine street. Midnight had passed, when a loud falsetto voice filled the dark room, and, escaping through the ventilator into the chamber above, awakened Seraltha. She sat upright, bewildered by the first sentence. The voice began the second sentence. Before it had ceased she stood upon the floor, and her eyes wandered in fright to discover the source. When the voice had completed a third utterance, she fled to the parlor and crouched in the furthest corner from her chamber, trembling with fear.


The voice had repeated the location and nature of the charm.

Half an hour later Lethe came to the vestibule, on the way to her chamber, and heard the ominous counting to eleven ringing through

the parlors. Hastening within, and guided through the darkness by Seraltha's voice, she found her kneeling where she had crouched. She hastily raised Seraltha and carried her toward the chamber from which she had fled. The clenching hands, that had heretofore been held downward by rigid arms while the counting continued, now struck Lethe's head and face, and fierce threats followed. Nevertheless, Lethe held firmly to her purpose, and after being placed upon her bed Seraltha's violence yielded to affectionate persuasion. She afterward consented to act the part assigned to her by Lethe's spirit advisers in the procurement of the charm. Her full consent, however, was only obtained upon Lethe's assurance that she would be constantly with her.

During the following day Lethe visited the cemetery and witnessed a burial in its farther limits; near the angle of a low wall that held the sand from drifting to the valley below. After the ceremonies were ended she counted from the wall along a row of mounds to the place where the burial had been made.

## CHAPTER XXV.

 HEAVY night fog moved off the storm disturbed ocean, and, smothering the roar of the breakers, spread its dense mantle over the sand dunes along the shore; over the valley beyond them; over the cemetery, and over the forms of two women, who groped closely along the higher wall toward the low angle verging upon the valley. It muffled their footsteps within the folds of drabbed gowns, and the rays from distant lamps shrank away into narrow disks of light.

Arriving at the low angle, the taller woman sprang upon the wall, and then lifted the other upon it. As she bent forward, a sharp metallic sound, as of steel instruments, came from a contact of the stone upon which she stood with objects suspended beneath her gown. Lethe St. Pier had guided Seraltha from the house on Pine street to the vicinity of the charm. She

now led her to an elevation of sand, and, smoothing it with her hands, said, in low tones:

“Set dar, honey, twil I come back foh yoh. When I come back dah chawm is ready foh dah scissors. Doan yoh let dah skeer come, chile. Keep it away. It spiles dah chawm.”

Seraltha responded with brave words; yet, after being seated, tiny streams of sand flowed down the elevation to her feet, loosened by the trembling form upon it. Lethe went from her to the first one of the row of mounds that she had counted in the day, and stooping felt about her. She then walked away from the wall, still stooping and touching the mounds. Seraltha heard the words:

“Two—four—six—seven—nine—eleven—thirteen! Dar’s grass! Dis is wrong!”

Lethe returned to the wall, and again stooping, walked away as before, but with slower movement:

“Two—four—five!—a little one!—six—seven—nine—eleven—thirteen!”

A moment later the dull sound of a shovel

pushed firmly into the sand struggled through the fog. Another sound!—that was not an echo. Two shovels were plying in the sand.

Half an hour passed. Subterranean sounds came faintly to Seraltha's ears, and the sand streams increased their flow down the elevation upon which she sat.

Soon afterward, Lethe St. Pier stood before Seraltha, and whispered:

“Come chile. Take hold ob mah hand. Keep dah skeer away. It spiles dah chawm.”

They walked through the fog to the place where the shovels had plied. Lethe raised Seraltha in her arms and bore her downward into an excavation. When she stood again a light, flashing from a watchman's lantern suddenly opened by Lethe, shone upon a lock of golden hair resting in half curl upon the sand. Lethe whispered:

“Dar's dah chawm. Yoh's dah one toh take it.”

Seraltha bent forward and reached her hand to take it. Lethe held her from it.

“Doan do dat. Yoh mus’ cut it wiv dah scissors.”

As Seraltha took the scissors from a pocket of her gown the blades clinked rapidly together.

“Keep away dah skeer! Keep away dah skeer! It spiles dah chawm.” Lethe spoke with deep earnestness, and, taking Seraltha’s hand, she steadily brought the scissors to the lock of hair. A convulsive closing of the blades and the severed lock curled upon itself. “Pick it up, chile, en put it in yoh bosom.”

Seraltha obeyed. The lock moved in still closer curl as she closed her bodice. She reeled, and falling into Lethe’s arms, was borne by her to the surface, and hurriedly to the low wall. When they arrived there, she had revived. Lethe did not know that she had been unconscious.

When they began their return to the house on Pine street, the sounds of falling sand came faintly through the dense fog. An hour later, Juan Bermuda placed two shovels in the dark room of the stable loft.

These were the words which had filled the incantation room and escaped through the ventilator to Seraltha's chamber.

“A lock of hair from a head twelve hours under the sand of the cemetery, cut by the woman without fear and put under the pillow of the man at midnight.”





## CHAPTER XXVI.

**S**ERALTHA, without consulting Abel Hyman, returned to her rooms in the Hotel Havencourt, on the evening of the day after the charm was taken from the cemetery. Chalmer Grose received her pleasantly. After she had used the charm in conformity with Lethe's instructions his manner toward her was so engaging that she had faith in its potency.

Her expectation of a residence at the Hotel del Monte was not realized, for upon arrival at Monterey, in accord with his letter to her, Chalmer Grose gave private orders to a coachman in waiting, who drove his carriage to a cottage which was nearly hidden from the street by vines and other foliage.

A man servant waited upon the carriage when it halted at a side veranda, and a woman whom he called Missus, preceded Seraltha to the single parlor of the cottage, and helped to arrange her

wardrobe, and that of Chalmer Grose, in an adjoining chamber.

No visitors were entertained in the cottage. After a month had passed Chalmer Grose began a series of visits to San Francisco, which gradually extended in time so that his stay in Monterey became of the nature of visits, and in the city that of residence.

Exclusive association with ignorant servants bore more severely upon Seraltha than solitude would have done, for they became objects of her aversion, the display of which escaped her control. At the close of the sixth month of her residence in the cottage, the servants refused to serve her longer, and departed. They had been under her sway since her arrival there—Chalmer Grose having given no heed to the domestic economy, except to furnish Seraltha money for expenses. He did not correspond with her during his absence, and when the servants departed two weeks had elapsed since his last visit to her.

The servants left the cottage at an early hour

of the day. Seraltha made no effort to secure others, but packed her trunks and proceeded by an afternoon train to San Francisco, and, upon her arrival there in the evening, to the Hotel Havencourt. An employee obstructed her progress to her rooms when she was about to enter the elevator, and upon an appeal to those in the office, she was informed that she would not be admitted as a guest of the hotel.

She became violent. Men pressed into the office and assisted the servants in expelling her. These would have placed her in the custody of a police officer, but Nat Rapps, who had arrived there opportunely, rescued her from this humiliation. He escorted her to a carriage, and accompanied her to another hotel. While on their way she expressed a desire to go to the house of Lethe St. Pier; but he gave a reason why she should not dwell there, to which she yielded assent.

A week later Chalmer Grose received a formal demand from Seraltha Ames Grose, through her attorney, Abel Hyman, for an allotment of

sufficient property to insure her a separate maintenance. To this demand he gave refusal, by attorney, because—the answer declared—she had dwelt with him as his mistress, and not as his wife. This was also the substance of his answer to her declarations and demands when proceedings for divorce and a division of property were afterward begun by her in a court of law.

The names of other attorneys appeared with that of Abel Hyman upon the documents introducing this contest, and an item published soon afterward in a real estate journal suggested to Chalmer Grose the identity of their retainer. This item announced the sale of valuable property by Lethe St. Pier, and seemed to be of interest to him, for he made it the subject of a conference with Hamilton Tucker in the office, No. 12 Hotel Havencourt Block.

On the following evening, immediately after the coming of darkness, Hamilton Tucker rode in a street car to the western limit of the city. After alighting, he walked through obscure neighborhoods to Pine street. He then changed

his direction and kept on his way toward the center of the city, until he arrived at the house of Lethe St. Pier.

When Lethe opened the door and bade him enter the reception room, she did not recognize her visitor. He wore a light mackintosh, which, being buttoned from neck to feet, concealed his figure. The upturned collar covered his lower face, meeting a driving-cap drawn down over his ears. After he was seated and had removed his cap, she became aware of his identity and began a protest against his visit, because of his relations to Chalmer Grose. Her speech, as she proceeded, was fast becoming a tirade against his employer and all who were in sympathy with him.

"I have left his service," he said, interrupting her.

"Then he has lost a good man," she instantly responded.

If Hamilton Tucker noticed the satire conveyed by Lethe's remark, he gave no sign of the fact, for he continued in a formal speech that savored of rehearsal:

“Our opinions upon important subjects are not in accord. We differ regarding the management of certain properties, and we can never become—er—reconciled. My interests seem to compel me to the action that I have taken, and—er—consequently I withdraw. Having accumulated a large sum of money during my—er connection with Mr. Chalmer Grose, I shall now invest it in a business of my own. I have considered mining, and have also considered a grain ranch. I know both; I mean—er—I am familiar with both, and could not be—be called down by anyone after I once got started.”

Hamilton Tucker's memory was evidently treacherous, for he looked toward the ceiling, and perspiration sprang out upon his forehead. He unbuttoned the mackintosh at his throat and chest, and, plying a kerchief vigorously over his face, continued his recital in familiar language:

“I want your help to show me where the biggest fortune is. I have got a chance at a silver mine, and I have got one at a grain ranch. The mine crops out well, and the soil of the ranch

is A 1. Your advice has made a fortune for Mr. Chalmer Grose, and several others I know of, and I want you to help me. I want a hundred dollars' worth to-night. That is for telling me what to do. When I get going, I will give you more to tell me the best way to manage."

He drew five twenty-dollar gold pieces from his pocket and held them toward Lethe in his open hand. The suspicion regarding his purpose, which her face had manifested, now gave place to love of gain. She arose from her seat, and, taking the money from his hand, said to him:

"I believe you, now. Come to the parlor. I will help you."

Leading the way, Lethe conducted him to the parlor, and, lighting it dimly, gave him a seat. She then inquired minutely regarding his finances, business methods and social habits. To all of her questions he made ready answer. She afterwards informed him that she would be absent an hour—perhaps two; and, requesting him to remain there until her return, she left the room.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

**H**ETHE had been absent from the parlor several minutes when Hamilton Tucker noted the time by his watch and buttoned his mackintosh. Drawing the driving-cap upon his head so as to completely cover his ears, he turned up the collar against it. He then took rubber shoes from an outside pocket and drew them over his boots. These fitted snugly and suppressed the sound of his footfall as he afterward walked about the parlor.

The time was past nine o'clock. When he entered the house, scattering drops of rain were falling perpendicularly from clouds drifting lazily from the ocean. As the night advanced, the clouds lowered. Now the rising wind drove oblique floods along the verandas, shaking the house meanwhile with rustling noises.

He walked in circuits of increasing distances until at one point he passed close by the draperies of the vestibule, bending his head in an attitude



of listening, and at the opposite point he peered through an open door into the darkness of the dressing-room. At times, as he approached the door, he seemed to shiver in response to the blasts outside, and to falter with weakness. Upon other circuits he boldly trod near its threshold, as if impelled by a sudden dash of courage. During one of these moments of resolution he stepped within the dressing-room. Emerging from it instantly, he walked waveringly upon the circuit of his former pathway, and his shivering shoulders rustled the cape of his mackintosh, which he nervously unbuttoned from throat to waist as he walked. He then made three full circuits of the parlors.

His face showed the weak lines of cowardice, of which his wavering steps and shivering form also gave evidence. He looked about the room, from window to window, as if he saw glances from an eye piercing through the curtains. A change came upon him when he had passed the vestibule upon the third circuit. A fierce expression overspread his face, and his chest swelled against his mackintosh as he rebuttoned

it. Drawing the collar to a level with his eyes, he hastened forward, and entered the dressing-room.

The storm outside seemed to be in complicity with him to suppress all sounds within the house, for he slowly groped along his way to the gorgeous chamber, and, carefully drawing its unsecured carpet away from a corner, he raised the trap door and rested it against the adjoining wall without disturbing the sorceress in the room below. Hastily stepping upon the narrow stairway, he began a forward descent. When his eyes came under the level of the opening, he stopped and looked upon the scene which suddenly appeared to his view.

By the dim light of a tin oil lamp, standing on a pine table, he saw muscular arms, long and black, moving beckoningly above the flame; sinewy hands reaching with grasping fingers toward their restless shadows upon the white wall beyond; a broad back, ebon as the night, rising long above disheveled folds of scarlet, and a turbaned head moving from side to side, as the eyes, which were turned from him, sought

to discover apparitions in the flame of the lamp.

The five pieces of gold which Lethe had taken from his hand lay in a crescent form upon the table. At times the right hand ceased its beckoning and pointed a finger toward them, while the left continued its movements, and her tongue uttered pleadings to unseen attendants in incessant and uncanny language. The broken cane-seated chair—unseen beneath the scarlet gown of the half-disrobed form upon it—croaked rhythms to her gestures that mocked the intonations of a smothering raven.

Hamilton Tucker shivered, as he had done when walking in the parlor, and his body wavered, shaking the insecure stairway upon which he stood. He reached above him for support, and, grasping the edge of the upturned door incautiously, he drew it violently downward. In an effort to protect himself from the falling door he lost his balance and fell to the foot of the stairway.

He sprang to his feet; but, before he was in position to attack, Lethe had pinioned his arms with her own. While struggling to free himself

from her grasp, he perceived an advantage and pushed her on the stairway. The shock of the fall caused her to release him.

Hamilton Tucker put one hand against Lethe's shoulder and with the other drew a weapon from the breast pocket of his mackintosh. The weapon had been placed to be readily drawn, for in the instant that his arms were freed his hand was uplifted, holding the stylet which had paled the face of Hermina at the charnel of the grain ranch.

He moved to strike, and had an ample mark. Lethe's sable breast glistened above the scarlet gown caught in disorder about her waist, and drew his aim. He had come prepared to kill without bearing away a token of his deed. The silent stylet might draw blood upon the impervious mackintosh, but stripped of it his clothing would be clean. He had come to kill. Seraltha would then be deprived of aid, and his master could rejoice in her defeat. He had come with cheer, for a princely recompense awaited his success.

Yet, the weapon did not reach its mark.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

**T**HE trap door had opened noiselessly. As Hamilton Tucker raised the stylet to a poise, a noose sped downward and closed around the upturned collar of his mackintosh. A glossy rope, stretching from his neck into the darkness of the upper room, threw him along the stairway. The stylet fell from his hand. Before he could arise, a form dropped down by his side that, with a foot against his chest, drew upon the rope and severed it with a knife close to his throat. Stunned and bewildered he staggered to his feet and looked around the room, as one peering through mists to see an approaching enemy. His hand rose above his head, as if the stylet was yet in its grasp, and then fell to his throat, clutching the cones of the revengeful lariat of Juan Bermuda, who, without scarf or sponge, now crouched upon the floor and looked upward, a silent laugh spreading in hideous lines of brown and yellow over his face.

The man above him, from clutching about his throat, began to grasp the air, and then a husky breath sounded throughout the room, drawn inward by a mighty effort of his chest. Juan Bermuda, still crouching, looked up at his victim and laughed until the breath came hissing out.

Another breath, drawn slowly inward by his anguished chest, and Hamilton Tucker threw himself against the door of the wainscoting and fell within the furnace-room. Arising, as if he had bounded upward, he ran to the iron door of the basement area. He tore away the bolt with a strength redoubled by despair, and, pushing the door aside, leaped upward to the ground. He sped across the lawn and down the steep driveway to the street.

The storm beat fast upon him, yet he ran along the street with increasing speed and turned from it to cross a vacant lot. Diagonally across the space the colored urns of a pharmacy glimmered through the rain drops. In the center of the lot a mast held an electric

light, which illuminated a wet and slippery pathway ascending toward the urns.

He faltered when he reached the path, and slipping, stumbled; but, pressing his hands against his chest, he rallied and ran swiftly onward. He stopped beneath the electric light. His knees smote together. He raised his hands above his head in an imploring clasp. The latest breath inhaled refused an expiration. He sank slowly to the pathway, and lay with his face toward the dazzling electric light, and with the colored urns of the pharmacy within his vision. \* \* \*

He saw a red blade spring out from an urn of the pharmacy, beveled like the stylet which he had poised above the form of Lethe St. Pier. It swiftly grew in length, and drove its point into the electric light above him, that now appeared a sun blazing broad and high. Drops of silvery blood fell from the wounded sun, splashing upon the pathway and into his staring eyes.

Another blade, of ceruleous blue, aimed its

point along the bevel of the red, and made another wound beside the first. Spangles of fire fell down with the silvery drops, as if the second thrust had pierced a fiery artery. The dazzling sun grew white and pale.

A yellow blade sped its point with lightning aim along the bevel of the blue. Green flames flashed from the fading sun, consuming the blades and the urns of the pharmacy.

The horizon turned black. In the zenith a radiant globe appeared, with zones of white and red, of yellow, blue and green, that, slowly rising, shrank to an iridescent star; this, rising still, twinkled in changing colors, from green to blue, to yellow, red and white, then shot aloft through eternal distances and waned to a ray—a point—an atom:—The eyes beneath the visor of the riding-cap saw—Death!

A workman hastening to a distant shop before the sun dispelled the dense fog which had followed the storm from the ocean and rested still and low upon the pavements of the city, turned from the street into the diagonal



pathway leading to the pharmacy. He whistled as he walked, and unseen linnets chirped responses from shadowy bushes upon either side.

Midway of the path he cried out in alarm. Glassy eyes, beneath the visor of a riding-cap, stared through the fog within a stride of him. His exclamation guided a policeman to where a man had died with a noose around his neck, which seemed to be an endless plaiting of black horsehair with cones distributed along its surface. No loop was visible. The policeman was a veteran in his occupation, yet, after he had examined the noose, he shivered and drew away, until a screen of fog hid the unaccountable death-weapon from his sight.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

**T**HREE revolvers, of different sizes, lay within a recess of the chiffonier in the gorgeous chamber of the house on Pine street, left there by Chalmer Grose when he removed to the Hotel Havencourt. A pearl handle ornamented the smaller one, that, although of effective caliber, seemed a toy beside its fellows. The one of medium length had a heavy magazine, a polished barrel, thick and short, and an ivory handle. A long hexagonal barrel distinguished the larger one, that in caliber and weight seemed fitted for a trooper's use. All were loaded, and beside each one lay a box of cartridges.

After his victim had fled from the incantation room Juan Bermuda put the five pieces of gold in his pocket, and, ascending the stairway to the room above, took the large revolver from the chiffonier. When the workman walked through the fog toward the pharmacy, Juan Bermuda

was many miles beyond the limits of the city, with a roll of blankets on his back, hastening through unfrequented ways toward a Mexican settlement in a canyon of the Coast Mountains.

If Nat Rapps had not been informed of the slaying of Hamilton Tucker, the absence of Juan Bermuda from the city would have been unnecessary to his safety from arrest. At the inquest no evidence appeared to reveal the movements of his victim throughout the evening before the discovery of the body. Hamilton Tucker was away from his usual haunts during that time, but had not made the purpose of his absence known to his associates. They could throw no light upon the mystery. Chalmer Grose denied knowledge of his movements, and Hermina seemed cheerful while giving similar testimony. The noose had been cut away by a surgeon, but it unfolded no tale to the detectives, except that of its fitness to produce a silent and lingering death. Alarming stories spread abroad from the Central Police Station of the advent in the city of anarchists who lurked in storm and fog to

kill prosperous citizens with grotesque weapons; and of the presence of assassins who had put aside the knife—fearing the tell-tale blood—and pounced upon their victims with a noose of horse hair, deftly coned to fit the neck of man or child.

Nat Rapps, hearing of this weapon, obtained permission to search the store-room of the Police Station, from which he brought the bundle to light that a fireman found upon the lawn of the Mission Dolores. From it the officials learned, with much chagrin, that Hamilton Tucker had died by the hand of a Mexican, who swung an ingenious lariat and cut the line from the noose with a table knife. Investigation, aided by the cleverness of Nat Rapps, materialized the myths of the Police Station to an eccentric individual who walked the streets only by night, with his face muffled as if he were an invalid, and who had lived in the Glen, and later at the house of Lethe St. Pier on Pine street.

Chance Neely, of the Private Detective Agency, being desirous of the reward then offered for the arrest of the slayer of his friend, and being fur-

nished with information from the reports of Nat Rapps in the *Investigator*, made a visit to the house on Pine street. When he arrived there he read a warrant to Lethe for the arrest of John Doe Mexican. Lethe St. Pier was superior to Chance Neely in craftiness. He searched the house and did not find the dark room by the furnace. All the effects by which the recent presence of Juan Bermuda might be proved were in that room. Prompted by what she said to him, he afterwards journeyed to the distant mountain city where Chalmer Grose had suffered from the wounds of the Cascades, and searched in the Mexican settlement near its limits, and in the mountains thereabout. Chance Neely being thus mislead, Juan Bermuda rested securely in his hiding place, three hundred miles away. After several days of vain search, Chance Neely returned to San Francisco, where he immediately became engaged in matters pertaining to the interests of the defendant in the divorce case of "*Grose versus Grose*," which, after many delays, came to a trial before a Judge of untarnished reputation.

## CHAPTER XXX.



NEEDY WRITER, walking along the street with a sinful story in his reticule, met a Ready Sale, who took the story from him and began to read aloud.

A Law Court sitting within a window near by, weighing Equities with a balance-scale, heard the reading and saw the Needy Writer hastening away with a large coin in his hand. The Law Court ceased his occupation, and, giving vigorous chase, caught the Needy Writer and brought him into the room where he kept the balance-scale.

The Law Court took the large coin away from the Needy Writer and threw him into an iron cage, which he locked with multifarious keys.

The Ready Sale still read the sinful story upon the street and had drawn a large concourse of people about him, who gave much applause.

In the midst of his reading, a Divorce Case,

in excessive *decollete*, saluted the Law Court in a loud voice and began to read her History, to which he listened dispassionately. The concourse of people deserted the Ready Sale, and, beckoning to others up and down the street, stood beside the window straining their necks to see and hear.

When the Law Court brought bread and water to the iron cage, the following morning, blushes covered the face of the Needy Writer, congested there from the hearing of the History.

\* \* \* \* \*

The progress of a day had been made upon the case of "*Grose versus Grose*." During the ensuing evening Seraltha visited Lethe St. Pier in the house on Pine street. In the various parleys and contentions between opposing counsel, which consumed the entire time of the opening day, the policy of the defense was foreshadowed as being that which is common in contested divorce cases: a convincing of the Court and the public that the biter is the one who has been bitten. References to the plain-

tiff were contemptuous, and brought resentment into her face, and the calumny of the answer to her petition drew lines of anger upon it. Her eyes moved rapidly in violet flashing and her hands became tightly clenched. The influence of Abel Hyman, exerted at the critical moment by soothing words, prevented more violent demonstrations of her derangement; still, the defense had profited. She was apparently vicious.

The demeanor of the day still lingered upon her when she entered Lethe's presence. She had laid aside her walking costume of latest fashion and now wore that of the surah-silk gown, even to the old English hat, and the satchel of oxidized hook and chain.

"What foh yoh wear dah ole cloz, chile?" Lethe questioned, after she had conducted Seraltha to the parlor. "En dah beautiful back hair lookin' zif 'twasn't had no brush en comb since yoh put dah dress on dah firs' time. En dah hair pins all comin' out!"

Seraltha made no response to these criti-



cisms upon her apparel, but excitedly rehearsed the readings and sayings uttered before the Court by the defendant's counsel, afterward bewailing her blemished reputation. Lethe listened intently—her eyes meanwhile beaming with sympathy—until an opportunity was given her to speak. Earnestly, and without the plantation accent she said:

“Listen to me, child! What I am going to tell you now is nothing that the spirits told me. It is what I see with my own eyes and know by my own finding. Something worse is waiting for you than the spiteful talk of Chalmer Grose and his lawyers—something worse, child, than the hurt to your reputation. The reputation won't be hurt when you get your share of the property, and nobody will lock the door when you want to come in the front way; but nothing will give satisfaction if you lose your life. Somebody is scheming to take that without getting into trouble afterward. I didn't find this out from spirits, child—spirits had nothing to do with it. I saw something, myself, and I

have read from it, the same as you read from a book, until the story is all told. This is the story: If Lethe St. Pier is killed, then Mrs. Chalmer Grose can't find any money for a divorce from Chalmer Grose. Lethe St. Pier don't get killed, and Mrs. Chalmer Grose can find plenty of money for a divorce, and she can keep it until she gets her money from Chalmer Grose. Then, what? If there was no Mrs. Chalmer Grose—if the lady who is Mrs. Chalmer Grose wasn't living anywhere on the earth—then Chalmer Grose would be a widower, and nobody would be asking for a divorce or for money. If Mrs. Chalmer Grose dies from poison, or is found on the street, or anywhere else, with a knife in her bosom and the handle sticking out on the left side, then the Coroner will say, 'She was ashamed of her life and took the poison,' or, 'She pushed the knife into her bosom with her right hand.' Then, what? Chalmer Grose has got no more trouble. This is a true story, child. Here is the knife that didn't get to the bosom of Lethe St. Pier, and here is

the revolver that will kill the man who tries to use another one."

Lethe drew from a pocket of her gown the stylet that Hamilton Tucker raised above her in the incantation room, and the medium-sized revolver of the chiffonier.

Seraltha had comprehended the story. The tide of her distraction was now in full flood, and the incidents of the day, together with the probabilities shown in the story, had served to develop another symptom of mental disorder—the delusion of persecution. She sprang from her seat, exclaiming:

"Yes! Yes! I know him! He watched me throughout the day! Give me both! Both! One I will fix in my corsage with a camlet sheath, and one I will carry by my side, in the satchel."

Lethe drew away from her, and returned the weapons to her pocket, yet Seraltha continued:

"He had a thievish face, and, sitting by the railing in the court-room, he gazed at me from between his stooping shoulders, marking

the place where he would strike. To-morrow he will sit nearer. Give them to me! Both! Both! I will meet him with them when he springs toward me."

Seraltha's face now expressed command. Approaching suddenly to Lethe's side, she seized her gown, and, thrusting a hand into its pocket, quickly grasped that within. She drew the stylet from the pocket. Lethe's sinewy fingers clasped her wrist, and for a moment kept the hand that held the weapon to a nerveless quiet. With the knowledge that she was being resisted came the mysterious strength of frenzy that enters a languid form and vamps its flaccid muscles with bands of steel. A cunning comes, out-feating reason.

Seraltha's eyes shone with purple gleams as she turned the captive wrist with sudden wrench and drove the blade of the stylet deep into Lethe's arm, the hilt escaping from her grasp. The heavy tendons of the arm contracted and held the the blade firmly. The pain of the wound sent a quiver through Lethe's form.

Before reaction came, the free hand of Seraltha had again entered the pocket of Lethe's gown; she saw the gleaming barrel of the revolver and heard the warning click of its hammer, as it rose before her face.

"Not me! Child! Lethe St. Pier has no thievish face!"

Lethe spoke gently, and dropped the hand that had held the stylet. The words, their suggestion, their kindly accents, and the release of the prisoned hand were timely. The weapon wavered an instant, then its aim was changed to a distant point in the room.

"No! Not Lethe St. Pier! The man with the thievish face! Is he here?" Lowering the weapon to the level of her waist, and still holding it in aim, Seraltha peered over it, waving the freed hand before her face, as if mists had gathered there: "He is sitting by the railing!" She moved a step forward. Her hand tightly clenched the handle of the revolver, and an inexperienced finger pressed upon the trigger-guard.

She lowered the revolver and advanced toward the point at which she had aimed. She stopped midway the parlor and looked around confusedly, then again looked toward the place of her aim.

"He is not there," she whispered. "The railing is in the court-room."

The revolver fell from her hand and she sank to the floor beside it. The spell of her frenzy was broken.

During the time of her occupation as nurse, Lethe had assisted surgeons in important operations. She knew of the action of veins and arteries. The absence of blood, except a drop that trickled along her wrist as she raised her arm to examine the hurt, after the aim of the revolver had been withdrawn from her face, showed her that no artery had been touched. Striving resolutely against the pain caused by the stylet, she followed Seraltha when she advanced toward the object of her hallucination, and was about to plead for possession of the revolver when Seraltha fell with it to the floor.

"Dah pore chile!" Lethe exclaimed, as she stooped and looked upon the prostrate form. "She nebber meant harm toh me. She's crazy froh dah spite of Chalmer Grose. Mebbe she's gwine to die!" Lethe stooped lower. "Her face done gittin' whiter en whiter! Who helped Chalmer Grose get his hands on her? Who helped him, I say? Lethe St. Pier! If I'se nebber prayed befo' in mah life I'se gwine toh now. Nobuddy ebber tole me how, but I'se gwine toh."

She knelt and clasped Seraltha's hand within her own. A drop of blood fell from the hilt of the stylet and traced a purple line across the white palm. Lethe wiped it away. Another drop fell and sank into the texture of the carpet. And another.

"Mebbe dis dah blood ob dah 'tonement dem colored folks shoutin' 'bout on dah plantation. I'se better been listenin' 'sted ob sayin' 'crazy folks.'" She wrapped her neckerchief about the hilt of the stylet and around her arm. Again clasping Seraltha's hand, she continued: "I'se

done been dat wicked toh help Chalmer Grose get his hands on dah chile. I'se sorry! Mebbe dat's gwine toh make some diffunce wiv dah Lawd, en He done keep her alive 'till Lethe St. Pier helps her toh get away froh dah trouble. He's gwine toh!"

Returning animation showed in Seraltha's face, and from spasmodic movements of her body, yet her frenzy had wasted her energies so that she could not arise without aid. Lethe cautiously secured the revolver and hid it away from sight in the upholstery of a sofa. She then raised Seraltha from the floor with the uninjured arm and gave her an unresisted support to the bed in the gorgeous chamber. Seraltha gave childlike compliance to Lethe's bidding that she should retire there, and remain in her care until morning. With Lethe's assistance she disrobed, and was soon asleep. She knew nothing of the stilet that still rested in its sinewy sheath. The hilt lay close to the forearm, concealed by folds of the ample kerchief, to which she had given no attention.



After Seraltha slept, Lethe hastened to her own chamber. Within a brief time she returned clothed in other garments, and sitting near the bedside, began the vigils of the night. Aided by stoic nerves she had accomplished a surgeon's task. A band of linen, tightly drawn, showed upon her arm within the loose sleeve of a morning gown. At times during the night pain sprang from under the band which bore anguish to her face. She would then look at the still form on the bed.

"Dah blood ob dah 'tonement drippin' in dar," she would whisper, when the pain abated. "Who helped Chalmer Grose get his hands on dah chile? Lethe St. Pier!"



## CHAPTER XXXI.

**S**ERALTHA'S manner gave no evidence of distraction when she awoke in the morning following her frenzied conduct with the weapons. Because of this Lethe soon left her, fully assured that she might safely do so. The deep sleep of the night had brought serenity to Seraltha; yet, after reflecting upon the incidents of the court-room, her thoughts reverted to the story told by Lethe, and a fear of danger followed.

Her memory of the parlor scene failed where she had attempted to possess the weapons, but she remembered that Lethe had declared the revolver to be an ample protection against future assault. After dressing, she opened the chiffonier and took the small revolver. As she put it in her satchel a look of triumph overspread her face.

Proceedings of the second day of her case had begun when she arrived at the court-room.

Approaching through chambers, she met Chance Neely, who was passing out hurriedly. A case of law books, standing in the centre of the room in which they met, obscured him from her sight, until in turning to pass around it she came abruptly within touch of him. Startled, she exclaimed:

“The thievish face!”

Stepping back, Seraltha quickly opened her satchel and plunged a hand within it. As if he felt that an avenger stood before him, he seized her, and, pushing her violently against the book case, ran out through the doorway by which she had entered. Bewildered by the shock, she mistook the direction in which he had fled, and, intent on pursuing him, she sprang through the doorway leading into the court-room. She halted just within the room, her eyes wandering in perplexity from the Judge, who looked down upon her from his bench, to faces in the audience, and among the lawyers and reporters within the railing. A stillness spread about the room that seemed to be in waiting for

a signal to become an uproar. Seraltha now held the revolver fully exposed to view.

An alert bailiff stepped from his place and wrenched the weapon from her. He had seized her arm, and was pushing her roughly toward the prisoner's dock, when Abel Hyman sprang forward and struck him with a clenched hand. The angered bailiff raised the revolver and pointed it toward the breast of his assailant, the glance of their eyes meeting at the same instant.

There is power in a resolute eye that is felt alike by the dolt and by the philosopher. Its comprehension pertains to the functions of a sixth sense. The muzzle of the weapon was lowered.

A temporary adjournment of the Court and an investigation made in Chambers, resulted in a fine imposed upon Chance Neely. Abel Hyman was censured and the revolver of his client retained by the Court.

"Should this occur again, by word or by deed," said Abel Hyman to Chance Neely, just

before re-entering the court-room, "you will find a bullet or a knife in your body."

The detective slunk away and stood behind the book-case, against which he had pushed Seraltha, until proceedings were resumed in the court-room.

The plaintiff's side of the case was soon presented: The marriage contract, accepted in evidence; the letter addressing Seraltha as "My dear wife"; proof of her residence with and maintenance by the defendant for three years, and of her declaration to the Court charging cruelty by the defendant's refusal to acknowledge her publicly as his wife, thus exposing her to contumely. Still, the day was consumed and the Court adjourned.

Soon after the opening of the Court upon the third day of the trial, a man with a studious face occupied the witness seat. A bailiff had placed a table before him, and his long, thin fingers were adjusting a microscope. The attorneys for the defense gathered before the table, showing deep interest in his proceedings, and

the large audience arose and stood straining to comprehend the purpose of the man with the microscope.

Sitting at another table near by, Chalmer Grose wrote upon a sheet of legal cap, similar to that upon which the marriage contract was written, and upon note paper like that of the letter bearing the greeting, "My dear wife."

Seraltha had become much agitated after reading a morning paper, in which an imaginative reporter filled two columns in description of the episode of the revolver. She sat among her lawyers—near Abel Hyman—at the counsel's table. The table upon which the microscope rested was only a few steps from her, and a few other steps would reach Chalmer Grose. Chance Neely sat beyond him on a heavy arm-chair, tilted back against the railing. The heels of his boots were caught securely among the rounds of his chair; the position bringing his eyes nearly to a level with his stooping shoulders.

A bailiff compelled the audience to be seated;

yet, here and there, faces stood out in relief, which reflected the mystery that burdened the air of the room.

The microscopist adjusted the instrument, and established his competency as an expert witness. He was then given the marriage contract, which, with the microscope, he scanned letter by letter and line by line. The letter greeting the plaintiff, "My dear wife," received the same careful scrutiny.

"Were both written by the same hand?" asked the lawyer who had questioned him before.

The witness answered: "The lines of one show vacillation, as if the hand that wrote was tremulous with emotion. It is the marriage contract."

A moan broke upon the stillness of the courtroom. Seraltha sprang from her seat, and, grasping the shoulder of Abel Hyman, looked around upon the audience. A forgotten voice came back to her memory. She exclaimed, with bated breath:

"The moaning of the sleeping-car—Hermina!"

Far to the rear she saw a veil fall over a pallid face. The form below it trembled.

The voice had touched another ear with memories, and another eye saw the pallid face before the veil fell. While the microscopist continued his examination Chalmer Grose hastily wrote a note, which by his direction Chance Neely gave to the woman who had moaned. Hermina read the note and went hurriedly out of the court-room.

Juan Bermuda had throttled only one of her masters.

The microscopist decided that both documents had been written by the same hand. He then placed beneath his instrument the writing that Chalmer Grose had done on the sheet of legal cap; it was a copy of the marriage contract, except the signature of Seraltha Ames. He then inspected the writing of Chalmer Grose upon the note-paper, which was a copy of the letter greeting Seraltha as "My dear wife."

After a careful comparison of the four papers, the witness voluntarily asserted:



"The documents in evidence indicate forgery!"

"Forgery!" cried Seraltha.

She sprang from her seat, and, escaping Abel Hyman's effort to intercept her, approached the table of the microscopist, repeating the word in mingled inquiry and exclamation. She seized the marriage contract. Hastening with it to Chalmer Grose, she held it before him and demanded a denial from him of the assertion made by the witness. Chalmer Grose looked into her face and saw her sight wandering over his person in violet flashes. There were other revolvers in the chiffonier besides the one of the pearl handle. He arose and drew away from her. Chance Neely hastened to place himself in front to protect him, at the same time advancing toward Seraltha with an evident intention to put his hands upon her. A knife blade glittered before his eyes, long and keen-edged. His arms remained rigidly extended as his eyes followed the movement of the blade upward. Then he dropped heavily to the floor.

From whence the knife was drawn, or where it was replaced the instant that he fell, Chance Neely did not know, but he saw the gleaming eyes of Abel Hyman looking down upon him, and he trembled with fear. The Judge saw the weapon drawn, and moved from his bench toward the dramatic scene. The bailiff saw it at the poise, and, keeping his position, turned toward the audience, where men were rising to their feet and women covering their faces. Chalmers Grose saw every movement of the weapon. He fled beyond the railing and stood among the audience.

A fine may not be a stigma. Contempt of Court is less than misdemeanor, if barren of intention against the dignity of the Court.

The Judge had returned to his bench, and the others to their respective places. One hundred dollars was the judgment rendered against Abel Hyman for drawing a weapon during a session of the Court. He paid the fine.

“And the possession of your weapon by me

until the termination of this trial," the Judge afterward added to his sentence.

Abel Hyman laid it upon the desk before the Judge.

"Allow me the sheath in which to keep it safely," the Judge requested, after a glance at the naked blade.

"The sheath is a fixture in my waistcoat," responded Abel Hyman.

Seraltha surrendered the marriage contract with much reluctance, and only upon the earnest persuasion of Abel Hyman, who returned it to the microscopist. Advantages were equalized between the plaintiff and defendant by the recent incidents. The eagerness of the microscopist in testifying betrayed a prejudice that might have been strengthened by the persuasive color of gold. Nevertheless, he gave cogent reasons in detail that supported his decision. Others, expert in his profession, testified in corroboration of him, consuming the time of the Court until the adjournment hour. Cross-examination had failed to weaken their position.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

**T**HE table used by the microscopists in their investigations still stood near the witness-seat when proceedings were resumed upon the fourth day. A lawyer of the defense called Chance Neely to the seat with an air of confidence and, producing a memorandum-book, lounged against the table. He testified that, in the service of Chalmer Grose as a detective, he discovered three cards in various places in Seraltha's chamber, after her desertion of the rooms in the Hotel Haven-court. The examining lawyer for the defense took these cards from the witness and offered them in evidence. They were accepted by the Court. The lawyer, by skillful questioning, caused Chance Neely to relate that, following the clue afforded by these cards, he had interviewed the person whose name was written upon them at his place of business, "The Calaveras."

During this interview, the witness asserted, he had used the arts of his profession so adroitly that Munroe Chase, the man who had written upon the cards, made a confession, although very reluctantly. This confession included an assertion that the differing dates upon the cards corresponded with the absence of Chalmer Grose from the city at various times; during which times Monroe Chase had visited the plaintiff at her rooms by her appointment.

Objection to this testimony being made by Abel Hyman, the Judge ordered it stricken out, except that part relating to the discovery of the cards and the employment of the witness as a detective in the interest of Chalmer Grose. Chance Neely, then being excused from the witness seat, betrayed deep chagrin, for his memorandum book exhibited hearsay evidence voluminously. Nat Rapps, who was reporting the case of "*Grose versus Grose*" for the *Investigator*, added to his discomfiture by saying in an undertone, as he passed the reporters' table, "The private detective is a foe to justice."

"Monroe Chase will take the witness stand," said a lawyer of the defense. No one responding, the lawyer arose and looked around. He repeated his request in louder tones. Receiving no response, the lawyer turned toward Chance Neely with a look of inquiry. Chance Neely sprang to his feet and so did Chalmer Grose. Hastily approaching each other, they met beside the reporters' table, and conversed in low tones. Their conversation was indistinct, yet Nat Rapps, who sat near them, heard the words, "Check for two thousand," spoken by Chalmer Grose.

Nat Rapps knew the banking house of Chalmer Grose. His astonished associates saw him spring from his chair and walk rapidly out of the court-room. A cab conveyed him to the banking house. After conversing a moment with the cashier, who nodded affirmatively to his inquiries, he returned to the cab and was driven with much speed to "The Calaveras." There he made inquiries for the proprietor. A barkeeper called his request to the porter of the

basement rooms, and immediately thereafter a man ascended the stairway who was recognized by Nat Rapps as a successful ward politician. In answer to a question made by the reporter, he said:

"I am the proprietor."

"Since when?" inquired Nat Rapps.

"Since last night, at ten o'clock."

"Bought out the other folks?"

"Bought out the other man. No folks in the transaction."

"Monroe Chase and Company. Who were the Company?"

"Myths," said the politician.

"A widow, and a private detective," asserted Nat Rapps.

"Nonsense! I've been a customer of this place three years, and I never saw or heard of anyone having a say here, except Monroe Chase, and there is no partnership agreement on record. I am all right, in any event. Possession covers the right of ownership and sale in this glorious climate."

"Pay him in coin?"

"Coin in hand. Five thousand dollars."

"Last night?"

"Last night, at ten o'clock."

"You were in a basement room when the money was paid, and Monroe Chase put it into a strong leather satchel," asserted Nat Rapps.

The ward politician looked at him in astonishment. Before he recovered, Nat Rapps had entered the cab and was speeding toward the court-house. Upon his way there he met Chance Neely, also in a cab, who visited "The Calaveras" and afterward the banking house of Chalmer Grose. Nat Rapps occupied his seat at the reporters' table when Chance Neely returned and again conversed with Chalmer Grose.

The strong leather satchel held seven thousand dollars in gold, and at that hour Monroe Chase was far away from the temptations of perjury.

The information gained by Chance Neely during his absence from the court-room remained a secret, imparted by him to none,



except Chalmer Grose and his lawyers. Nevertheless, upon the following morning the *Investigator* published an account of the flight of Monroe Chase, of the amount of money in his possession and the sources from which he had obtained it.

The defense, having no other witnesses to testify against Seraltha's character, now rested their case. Evidence for the plaintiff, in rebuttal, failed to overthrow the position of the microscopists, the only evidence favoring her being given by herself, and this related to the espousal scene at the mahogany table in the parlor of the house on Pine street; to all of which Chalmer Grose testified in denial.

Arguments of opposing counsel occupied the time of two days, during which Chalmer Grose did not appear in the court-room. Feeling assured of victory, because of the decision of the microscopists that the marriage contract and the letter were forgeries, and also encouraged by the predictions of his counsel, he put

aside thoughts of the unpleasant affair and resumed his usual ways.

When the arguments were concluded, the Judge announced that a decision would be rendered the following week. As he did not specify a date, Chance Neely was continued in the service of Chalmer Grose. He was instructed to attend the court daily, and immediately upon a decision being rendered by the Judge to bear its import to his employer.

During an afternoon of the following week, and in the interval between cases of less importance, the Judge summoned the lawyers interested in the case of "*Grose versus Grose*," and read his decision. Chance Neely, who sat among the audience, arose when the Judge ceased reading and walked slowly out at the door as if oppressed by a heavy burden. He stopped, when outside, and looked up and down the street like one who had lost his bearing. He held his slouch hat under his right arm while sitting in the court-room, and he still kept it there when standing before the door. The hat remained

under his arm, unnoticed by him, when he afterward turned and walked toward the Hotel Havencourt.

He recovered his self-possession as he walked and placed his hat on his head; but his movements still suggested the pressure of a burden. He entered the hotel and went directly to the parlor of Chalmer Grose. Arriving at the door, he raised his hand to rap. The sound of laughter came faintly to his ears from within; it was the voice of a woman. Chance Neely lowered his hand and stood in waiting. The laughter became hilarious. He tore a leaf from his memorandum book and, placing it against the wall, wrote upon it. The time was four o'clock in the afternoon.

Chalmer Grose sat within the parlor, before a table profusely covered with the residue of a savory dinner. A champagne bottle stood within his reach, and from it he had poured the last of the contents into two wine goblets. While the wine sparkled, he set a goblet before a woman who sat opposite to him. He raised

the other goblet to his lips, and, after sipping the wine, replaced it upon the table, making facetious mention, as he did so, of a divorce case which he termed "*Seraltha versus Grose*." The woman responded with the laughter that had stayed the hand of Chance Neely. Flushes of crimson overspread her brunette cheeks, brought there by the wine, and an ecstasy of mirth flashed in her lustrous dark eyes. She had entered the rooms an hour before, by way of the exclusive corridor. Passing through the parlor and chamber to the dressing-room—once Seraltha's—she removed her cloak and hat. She then went to the parlor of Chalmer Grose and dined with him.

Chance Neely completed his writing, and, returning to the door, he rapped. The laughter of the woman had then ceased, and before Chalmer Grose opened the door in response to the summons, she hastened to the dressing-room, where she had put aside her hat and cloak. She sat upon a chair before an easel-mirror and waited.

When the door was opened, Chalmer Grose took the book-leaf which Chance Neely handed him and read the writing upon it. As he read, anger congested his cheeks and his face drew into wrinkles. He attempted to speak, but the words died in his throat. Clutching the message in his left hand, he approached the dining table, staggering as he walked. He drank the wine remaining in his goblet in a single gulp. Hastening to his chamber with swerving footsteps, he sank upon his bed. His right hand seized the garments over his heart. A shiver crept over his form from head to feet, and when it ceased the scarlet slowly faded from his cheeks. Death covered his face with the hue of ashes.

The woman, who had waited beside the easel-mirror, arose and went toward the silent parlor that she had left. The lowering sun threw yellow rays against the upper windows of the house across the street, that drew tints from the blue sky above and reflected a sheen of emerald over the form of Chalmer Grose. A dusky pallor drove the crimson from the cheeks of the woman

when she entered his chamber and looked upon his face. With eyes dilated by fear she sought her hat and cloak, and stealthily left the hotel.

Chance Neely had expected a calamity when Chalmer Grose staggered to his chamber, and ran to summon a physician. When the physician arrived he raised the left hand of the form before him. The relaxing fingers dropped a paper from their grasp. He gently lowered the hand to the bed, and, smoothing the crumpled paper, held it toward the light and read:

“Decree of divorce granted, and summons issued for defendant to appear in Court and schedule property. The Judge declares that the preponderance of evidence is on the side of the plaintiff, he having decided a question of veracity in her favor regarding the signing of the marriage contract in the house on Pine street.”

After imparting this information the writer became sympathetic, for he added:

“The higher Court may reverse this decision. Of course, you will appeal the case.”

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

**A**BOUT twelve o'clock of a stormy night, a month after the death of Chalmer Grose, Juan Bermuda entered the grounds of the house on Pine street by way of the steep driveway, and stood among the shrubbery. Awhile he listened intently, then stealthily moved along the lawn to a cypress that swayed its dark boughs over a veranda of the house.

Standing close to the tree, he drew a lariat of black horse-hair from an inner pocket of his coat and wound it into a coil. Again he listened, and swung the lariat to and fro. The gurgling of water in the rain-spouts of the veranda, the moaning of wind among the trees and shrubs, and hoarse signals of a fog-horn at the distant Heads, were all the sounds he heard.

Swinging the lariat about his head, he threw it upward among the branches. Drops of water

splashed upon his face from the shaken foliage. Grasping the double line, now hanging from above, he ascended and stepped upon the roof of the veranda. He then drew his lariat from the tree, and, recoiling it, turned toward a dormer-window in the roof. Raising the lower sash, he crept inside and closed the curtain.

He had scarcely stepped away from the window when a door of the room opened. Lethe St. Pier entered bearing a lighted oil lamp, like that in the dark room by the furnace. She looked at him as at one not wholly unexpected, and asked him to be seated. Seating herself near him, still holding the lamp, she gently chided him for venturing into the city. Glances of affection rewarded Lethe's kind words.

Lethe told Juan Bermuda of the searches made for him throughout the city and in the house in which they were. She then urged him to return to his hiding-place without delay. He shook his head and looked about him, upon the comforts of his former lodging—a soft, snowy bed, a hammock slung to view the distant



highlands through open windows, and a broad arm-chair that invited to luxurious repose. Nothing was missing from his room—all that he had before enjoyed was there.

Lethe saw his eyes lingering here and there as he looked about, and, relenting in her purpose to urge him away, lighted the gas and bade him remain until the storm was over. He went to her side and tried to speak through the folds of his scarf. Divining his meaning, she returned to her seat and told him of Seraltha; of her successful divorce; of the incidents connected with it, and lastly told him of the death of Chalmer Grose.

While Lethe was speaking of Chalmer Grose, Juan Bermuda looked at her as a dead man might, with wide opened eyes. His prey was gone; his only aim in life after his return to the mine of which he had been robbed, was lost. Without a farewell to her, he opened the window and stepped out upon the roof. In a moment he again stood by the cypress, carefully coiling his lariat as he drew it down from the boughs

above him. He did not skulk, as he had done when he approached the house, but walked boldly along the lawn and down the granite stair-way to the side-walk of Pine street. He walked two blocks toward the cemeteries; then, as if impelled by a sudden thought, turned and walked rapidly back, past the stairway to a place in the street beyond, where a row of elm trees shaded the walk. He looked up into the first tree as he came beneath it, and walking around it drew forth his lariat. Sleeping birds, startled by his footfalls plashing in pools of water, flew from the tree, plunging noisily into the nearest tree beyond. He turned away. As he walked along the pavement of the street the frightened birds flew before him from tree to tree.

Avoiding the sidewalks, Juan Bermuda went on until he came before the Hotel Havencourt. Here he halted and stood like a statue in the middle of the street, gazing into the entrance of the hotel. The first stroke of the hour from a distant bell came faintly to him through the

storm. The swerving blasts caught the second and third strokes, and bore them clangorously across the city. As if to move in their company, Juan Bermuda sprang forward and ran toward the bay.

A misty darkness covered the bay and gloomed the shore, hiding the wharf lights at times and anon bearing their broken rays in fitful flashes over the piers, or downward upon dark waves sweeping heavily along the front. Reaching the wharf, and turning from the street, he walked out upon a pier that stretched far into the bay. He halted beside a wharf light that cast a sheen upon the water; it seemed to be the last one on the pier. Looking out over the water below him, he saw his shadow dancing upon the waves, which, turned back by the heavier swells at the limit of the pier, noisily lapped the piling.

Drawing away, he crossed the pier and looked into the darkness beyond its edge. A fishing tartan, moored to the piling below, swayed its mast toward him from the gloom. He stepped back from the approaching mast, and, looking

out toward the bay, saw the dim rays of another wharf light through a rift in the storm-mist; an instant, only, then it was hidden. As the light flashed again he followed the rays, and, with halts and groping, soon stood beneath it—the signal light on the end of the pier. He looked outward into the dense darkness over the bay; then behind him, whence he had come. No sound came to his ears, except of the wind, the falling rain, and the waves splashing against the piling. He took off his hat and laid it down; a gust of wind swept it away; he gave it no heed. Stooping, he gazed downward.

If he thought of ending his now aimless life, this was an ample place. A million men might lie beneath the dark waves and not a form be seen along their deepest troughs.

He stooped lower. Touching his finger-tips upon the brink, he swayed backward, then forward; again, to and fro, with increasing energy; again backward: a wrecker shot out from the darkness before him, with stacks belching sparks and valves quivering from

escaping steam. As the wrecker rounded to beside the pier, Juan Bermuda hid himself from the sight of those on board. Hoarse commands, the rustle of ropes and the clangor of iron against iron, came to his ears from the vessel; then all was in silence, as deep as the darkness on bay and shore.

Forty-three hours the wrecker's crew had braved the storm to give aid to disabled ships. Exhausted, the deckmen hastened to their berths, and in a moment slept; the pilot lay behind his wheel; the stoker threw the furnace doors wide open and rested beside the bunkers.

Juan Bermuda crept to the edge of the pier and looked within the wrecker. It rose toward him upon a swell. The boat-lights showed him the pilot, asleep. The wrecker sank behind the wave. Through a hatchway he saw the opened furnace doors and the fire shining red beyond them. When the wrecker rose again he leaped upon the deck and looked around him. The pilot slept. He hastened down the iron stairs of the furnace-room and stood before the open

furnace doors. Stooping, he looked at the fire within, and then about the room. The stoker lay asleep on the floor—a white man grimed with coal dust; naked to his waist.

Juan Bermuda gazed into the furnace. Slender tongues of red and white flame shot upward from the bed of burning coal like fiery grasses, consuming as they grew. He approached nearer, and, taking the battered bullet from his pocket, held it close to the furnace light—looking upon it as he had done when holding it toward the puffing engine that drew ore from the depths of his mine for Chalmer Grose. Rage shook his frame; his hand closed tightly upon the bullet; blood dripped down, hissing against the furnace front. He threw the bullet upon the bed of fire. It slowly spread and sank among the roots of the fiery grasses.

From an outside pocket he drew a steel table knife, encased in a leather sheath, and threw it upon the fire. The sheath rolled open like a scroll, and the blade became violet, then crimson, then white.

Drawing the lariat from his pocket, he pushed the loop of the noose beyond the highest cone. A deeper yellow gleamed in his eyes. He pushed the loop beyond another cone, and the yellow deepened. He pushed the loop beyond the lowest cone, then threw the lariat upon the fire beside the knife. It writhed and twisted like a thing alive, and in an instant lay upon the lurid coals, a serpent of white ashes.

Taking off his steaming coat and his long scarf, he rolled them into a bundle upon the iron floor. From an inner garment he drew forth an object that glistened with the blue of steel as it came into the furnace light—the large revolver of the chiffonier. He aimed it at the ashen serpent coiled upon the fire, and crept within the furnace.

A pistol-shot rang through the furnace doors. The stoker sprang to his feet, and, looking wildly around, saw the shadow of a steaming face against the bunkers. Another pistol shot! It drew him to the furnace. Looking within, he saw a man crouched upon the burning coals,

aiming a revolver at a coiled target in the crimson fire. The stoker sprang upon the iron stairway. Another shot! With hands and feet he hastened upward. Another shot! The stoker threw himself from the wrecker to the pier. Another pistol shot! Another! Words came through the furnace door—" *O Dios!*" The stoker raised his hands above his head, and fled along the pier to the streets beyond.

\* \* \* \* \*





## CHAPTER XXXIV.

**A**FTER the death of Chalmer Grose, his heirs came forward to contest the claim of Seraltha Ames Grose in his estate, taking the ground that she was an adventuress and an *intriguante*. To this end they were aided by a few members of the Press, who, for their purposes, used the unfavorable circumstances against her that the trial had developed.

After the granting of her decree of divorce, Seraltha lived in retirement at her hotel. An evening paper gave the first notice of the appeal of "Grose *versus* Grose" as a simple matter of news. The ensuing morning papers contained the same information, and some added clear hints that Seraltha was an adventuress. The effect of these charges soon became manifested. She was serene when she began reading, and her morning attire was tasteful and appropriate; but when she had finished, her demeanor

changed to one of uncertainty, and afterward to a positive frenzy.

She frantically removed her morning gown, throwing it on the floor, and put on the surah-silk. When ready to go upon the street she took the newspapers and held them in a crumpled roll under her arm. Her manner, while passing out of the hotel, showed indecision. She suddenly halted and returned to her rooms, walking slowly as if in thought. Upon arrival there she opened a trunk and took from it the pearl-handled revolver, which she placed in the satchel that hung by her side. After the decree of divorce had been granted the Judge restored the weapon to her. It was loaded. Abel Hyman advised her to carry it when she might go in public places. He also expressed admiration for her courage in the attempted use of it when Chance Neely assaulted her.

As Seraltha again left her rooms a smile lighted her face, of a deeper meaning than that which overspread it when she removed the weapon from the chiffonier in the house on

Pine street. Although she walked rapidly, she closely observed the people whom she met. Three squares from the hotel, her attention became fixed upon a man who stood before a shop window a few doors beyond her, and who appeared to be interested in the display within. She halted, and, after intently observing him, withdrew into a doorway, from which she peered out at the man before the window, who soon left it and approached her. Withdrawing into the doorway, she opened her satchel and seized the revolver. While awaiting his approach her eyes glistened with a purple light.

Although she had waited long enough, the man did not pass by. She stepped to the sidewalk and eagerly sought him. He had entered an intervening shop. He wore a slouch hat, and as he had stood stoopingly at the window, she thought he was Chance Neely.

Seraltha was greatly excited as she continued her journey to the house on Pine street. Immediately after being admitted by Lethe St. Pier, she began reviling the man who sat by the rail-

ing during the trial of "*Grose versus Grose*." At times she would cease speaking, and read the papers which alluded to her as an adventuress. Afterward she would assert that the man with the stooping shoulders had caused the publication, and that he was now in search of her to injure or kill her.

"For," she said to Lethe, in an interval of her reading, "he stood by the window and waited for me with weapons, but ran away when I grasped the revolver with which to protect myself."

Her conduct was beyond Lethe's understanding. After neatly arranging the coils of Seraltha's hair, and chiding her for wearing the old gown of surah-silk, Lethe prevailed upon her to visit Abel Hyman and consult him regarding the publications. Ordering a carriage, Seraltha drove away under this delusion of persecution.

When she arrived at his office, Abel Hyman was seated at his desk reading the stories that had so greatly excited her. His indignation equalled her distraction, and increased as she

placed a crumpled roll of newspapers upon his desk and knelt by his side, resting her hands upon his knee, and burying her face within them.

"All who allowed these slanders to be printed," he exclaimed, as he looked down upon her, "should be made to face a pistol ten paces away! The Creator of honor would so aim the weapon that each cowardly traducer would fall."

He bent forward and placed his hand upon Seraltha's shoulder. She had become calm when she entered his presence, and an intuitive reliance upon his ability to protect her from injustice had caused her to kneel by his side. His passionate speech restored her delusion. She raised her head, and a shade of vindictiveness overspread her face as her sight met his angry glances. Unclasping her satchel, she grasped the revolver and held it toward him.

"Take it!" she exclaimed. "He is on the street, watching and waiting for me. He follows me whenever I go from my rooms. Take it! You have a knife. Use both!"

The weapon, as she held it toward him, pointed at his breast. The hammer was still drawn, yet Abel Hyman took it from her without evidence of emotion, except an increasing anger. He lowered the hammer, and, placing the weapon in his pocket, arose and assisted Seraltha to her feet.

"Who is 'he?' What is the name of the man who waits and watches for you, and follows you on the street?" he demanded, still holding her hand, which he had taken when assisting her to arise.

"The man with the thievish face. Come! I will find him for you."

Her excitement increased, and she moved toward the door. He resisted her gently, placing his arm around her waist.

"Many men have thievish faces," he responded. "Tell me his name. I can then find him without your aid. Do not search for him. That is for me to do."

She did not move to oppose his request, but, yielding to the control of his arm, looked

downward in meditation. For a moment they stood silent, and then she looked into his eyes. The look was of trust. The lines of anger disappeared from his face, and a light overspread it that was apart from the law and its profession. His head bent nearer to her as he awaited her reply. She had heard the man's name in the court-room, but her recollection of it failed.

"He sat by the railing," she said, "and gazed at me from between his stooping shoulders. When I was alone he attacked me. He dared not put his hand upon me when you came to my aid. He fell to the floor when you looked down upon him."

Abel Hyman felt the touch of her shoulder against his breast, and felt a gentle pressure from the hand that rested in his. He knew whom she meant, yet the light in his face remained unclouded.

"Chance Neely! Even vipers pursue her!"

He looked upward, as if listening. Long ago words were whispered to him: "Seraltha. Love her and—" Obedience to the completed sen-

tence would be a pledge of his life to defend the honor of the woman by his side; to put her in the high place among women held by the one upon whose lips the wish died: "take her as your wife." \* \* \*

The touch of her shoulder against his breast had become a pressure. A hand moved slowly upward along his arm and rested upon his shoulder. Looking downward, into an upturned face, he saw a reflection of the light upon his own shining in a smile. A steady radiance poured from her eyes.

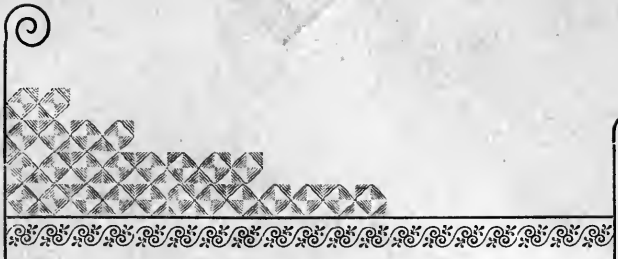
"Seraltha," he said, "the Judge, who freed you from an oppressor, can give you a protector, who will be to you a husband and a lover. Go with me to him, and become the wife of Abel Hyman."

He drew her closer to him, and yet closer, until she heard the beating of his heart. When their lips met she clung to him.

As Seraltha stood in the court-room by the side of Abel Hyman, and heard the words that made her his wife, she bowed her head, and tears brimmed her eyes.







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